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WELCOME!

EDITOR'S ILLUSTRATION BY NEO PHOENIX

In the current climate, comics offer us the perfect escape from the maddening world we live in. With blockbuster movies hitting our screens it is an easy world to dip into or fully immerse yourself in. This issue, we're taking a leaf out of DC's book and concentrating our efforts on Women In Comics, it's a movement that sees writers and artists attempting to get a fairer spread of representation into our marketplace. You can read about Wonder Woman's beginnings and the struggles of female characters and creators alike over on page 34. What's more, John Romita Sr talks about the origins of Gwen Stacy and MJ and how they both stand the test of time in Spider-Man's life. Chris Claremont talks about the power of women, and his efforts to represent true women in his work, as well as talking to us about his successes as a whole. Elsewhere we discuss the webs of Spider-Man's ultimate legacy, and how it came to be; Brian Michael Bendis talks about his latest projects; as always we look into the current status of the indie market and get the first word on the latest from Marvel, Generations. It's a packed issue and we hope you enjoy it.

Jen

Jen Neal, Editor

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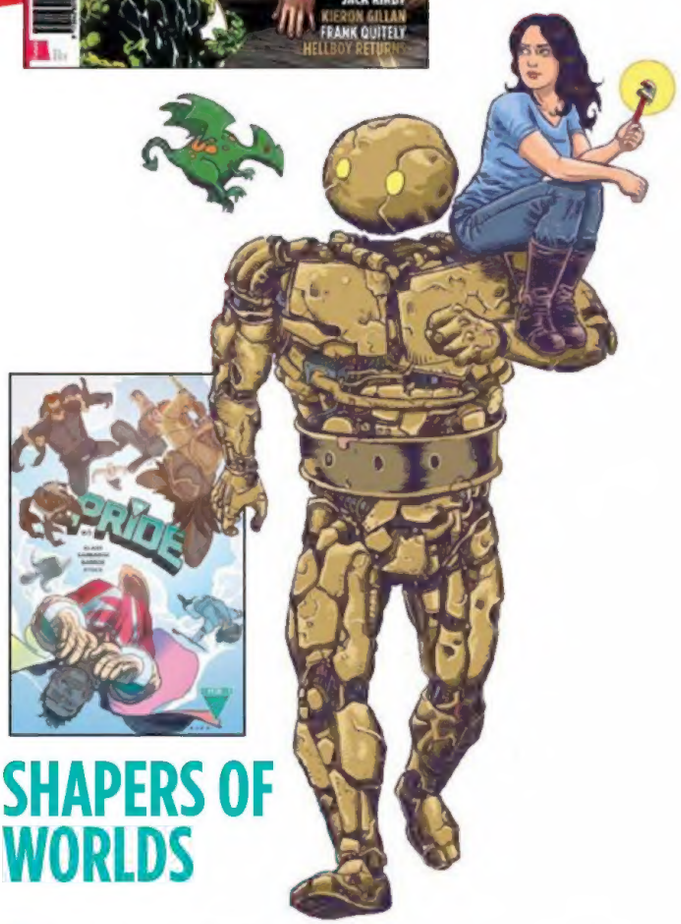

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HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE COMICS WORLD

Generations will be a 10-part series beginning in the Vanishing Point

Hinted at in February of this year, *Generations* will debut in August

MIND THE AGE GAP

Marvel Executive Editor **Tom Brevoort** and writer **Brian Michael Bendis** tell **Stephen Jewell** about bringing together old and new in the House of Ideas latest crossover, *Generations*

The House of Ideas is known for pushing boundaries and going the extra mile when it comes to their stories. Some are viewed as controversial; their new arc spins out of the ideas of Secret Empire, a currently-being-published arc by Marvel that has certainly garnered some attention. From the creator that brought us Ultimates, comes a new generation… We spoke to writer Brian Michael Bendis and executive editor Tom Brevoort about the development and changes that Generations brings with it.

***Generations* actually spins out of *Secret Empire*. Is it unusual to have an event book that stems directly from another event book while that first event book is still being published?**

TB: I don't know. I think we get too hung up on defining certain series as event books. *Generations* is only an 'event' in that it's a noteworthy story or initiative that we're promoting. It's a lot more intimate and characterisation-based than what you'd typically think of as an event book. We've been referring to it as a maxi-series, which is as good a term for what it is as anything.

BMB: I can't take any credit for it, but it is birthed out of *Secret Empire*. It was offered to me as a great opportunity to explore these characters using a narrative I wouldn't have been able to pull off myself. But as the Marvel Universe is a shared universe, we're able to have these moments where I can examine the characters in this unique way.

"GENERATIONS DEFINITELY HANDS OFF TO MARVEL LEGACY. THE CHARACTERS' EXPERIENCES IN GENERATIONS WILL INFORM SOME OF THE CHOICES THEY GO ON TO MAKE"

***Generations* centres around the latest versions of the likes of Thor, Hulk and Wolverine joining forces with their classic incarnations. Is it interesting to compare and contrast their differing attitudes to superheroing?**

TB: There's a little bit more of a wrinkle to what we're doing in *Generations* than that, but I'm content to let that reveal itself in the stories themselves. But certainly, the attraction is to pair up our young successor characters with their inspirations more-or-less at a time when they were similarly unseasoned and see what that tells us about all of them. But each individual pairing is going to reveal different things about the players involved.

Generations: Marvels, the Captain Marvel and Ms Marvel story by Margaret Stohl and Brett Schoonover is going to be markedly different from *Generations: The Americas*, Nick Spencer and Paul Renaud's Captain America story, or Kelly Thompson and Stefano Raffaele's *Generations: The Archers*, their Kate Bishop and young Clint Barton Hawkeye story.

While most of the series will focus on the respective heroes' formative days, Brian and Mel Ruby's *Generations: The Iron* will team Riri up with Tony Stark, Sorcerer Supreme, who we last saw in the 2014 *X-Men* Annuals…

BMB: Riri has already met Tony Stark, and she currently has a Tony Stark AI. So I thought that if she went and met 15-year-old Tony Stark then it wouldn't be so illuminating for her as meeting Old Man Tony Stark, who has learned everything and had done things differently with technology than she would have thought he ever would have done. A lot of thought then went into who would be the best Tony Stark for her to meet, and we decided that it was this one.

Just as you are doing in *Spider-Men 2*, *Generations: The Spider* sees Peter Parker meeting Miles Morales at a crucial turning point in the original Wallcrawler's life…

TB: These are genuinely different kinds of stories, but the emotion of *Spider-Men* is a good comparison to what we're trying to accomplish with *Generations*.

So will *Generations* be a completely self-contained series, or is there an overarching storyline that ties the issues together or indeed links it with *Secret Empire*?

TB: While each of the *Generations* books stands on its own, they are all linked to one another and also to the element in *Secret Empire* that sets them up. We are crafting these issues with an eye towards making them good entry points into the Marvel Universe for readers who haven't been following along with these characters so closely.

Did you call the series *Generations* because it is indicative of how the Marvel Universe is really one big happy family?

TB: Well, sure. But it also reflects an aspect of the readership as well and the way that each successive generation has stories and characters that they bond with and love. It's like how during that long period in the '70s, '80s and '90s when Chris Claremont was writing *Uncanny X-Men* and how different fans would decry the fact that he'd been on the book for so long, and that his best stuff was behind him on the series. But they'd each have a different idea as to which iteration had been the 'best stuff', and it was typically based on when they'd started reading the book. And that went all the way up until the end, when Chris' successors had to deal with the charge that they weren't as good as Chris had been at the end.

So has *Generations* grown out of Marvel's five-decade-long heritage, starting with *Fantastic Four #1* in 1961?

TB: Historically, Marvel hasn't done a whole lot with the concept of legacy characters, of a heroic dynasty that's passed down from generation to generation, but right at this moment, we find ourselves with a lot of them. So that's what this series will explore, and *Generations* seemed to be the term that best encapsulated that idea.

Speaking of legacies, will *Generations* lead into the *Marvel Legacy* re-launch later this year, which will see your most popular characters returning to their core principles and their titles' original numbering…

TB: *Generations* definitely hands off to *Marvel Legacy*. The experiences that our various heroes will have gone through in *Generations* they will carry them with them as they move into *Marvel Legacy*, and those experiences will inform some of the choices that they go on to make.

The original Wolverine will be among many old faces returning

BEANO GOES ONLINE

David Barnett talks to the head of Beano Studios Mike Stirling about reaching a new generation

Celebrating its 80th anniversary next year, the quintessentially British comic brand *The Beano* is expanding into digital platforms and TV at an unprecedented rate… but has pledged that the weekly physical product will remain core to its business.

The Beano is the UK's longest-running comic, having launched on 30 July 1938, and it's the home of long-standing classic strips including, of course, *Dennis The Menace*, *The Bash Street Kids*, *Roger the Dodger*, *Minnie The Minx* and *Bananaman*.

Ahead of the anniversary, Dundee-based publisher DC Thomson has been busy launching a raft of new media projects… which might conceivably raise fears for the print title from those who remember *The Beano*'s equally venerable stable-mate *The Dandy*.

The Dandy and its cast of characters – including Korky the Cat and Desperate Dan – stopped publication in 2012 and went online-only in a not-so-successful experiment. But DC Thomson has learned from that and *The Beano* is in a much stronger position.

When *The Dandy* ceased print publication it was selling 8,000 copies a week. According to the last-released circulation figures for *The Beano*, which cover the whole of 2016, the comic was selling almost 35,000 copies a week – a 3.2 per cent increase year-on-year and the second consecutive annual jump in circulation.

Not only does *The Beano* have a newly launched website, **beano.com**, alongside a free tablet/smartphone app – both of which provide daily updated material and exclusive, interactive content – the new initiative Beano Studios has been launched to globally push the Beano brand, with its first major project being a top-grade CGI animated series starring the much-loved flagship characters, Dennis the Menace and Gnasher, which is due to debut later this year on the BBC's children's channel, CBBC.

"A TOP-GRADE CGI ANIMATED SERIES IS DUE TO DEBUT LATER THIS YEAR ON THE CBBC CHANNEL"

So is the writing on the wall for the print comic? Absolutely not, says Mike Stirling, head of Beano Studios. "Everything we are doing is hugely exciting but it is all designed to complement the comic, not replace it," says Stirling. "Our sales have been increasing and we see ourselves as custodians of a trusted comic that's engaged generations of readers. What we are doing is growing our audience, and engaging with the next generation of readers."

DC Thomson and the Beano brand in particular has a solid outreach programme that works with schools and regularly invites groups of children into their Dundee offices (they've just moved back into their refurbished Meadowside building, the original home of the company, after a six-year sojourn at different premises). This not only helps to promote *The Beano*, but allows the editorial team to keep their ear to the ground with what's exciting kids today.

Unlike other long-running comic brands such as, say, *2000AD* in the UK and Marvel and DC

The *Beano* mag provides a weekly helping of mischief and mayhem

globally, the bulk of *The Beano*'s readers aren't made up of 'legacy' readers who have continued to read the comic into adulthood.

The Beano is aimed at six- to 12-year-olds and the success of the comic over eight decades has relied on the comic constantly engaging new groups of young readers every couple of years. They walk a tightrope of maintaining the idea of *The Beano* as a trusted brand which appeals to parents and teachers, while still offering enough mischief and rebellion to give its young readers proper ownership of the comic.

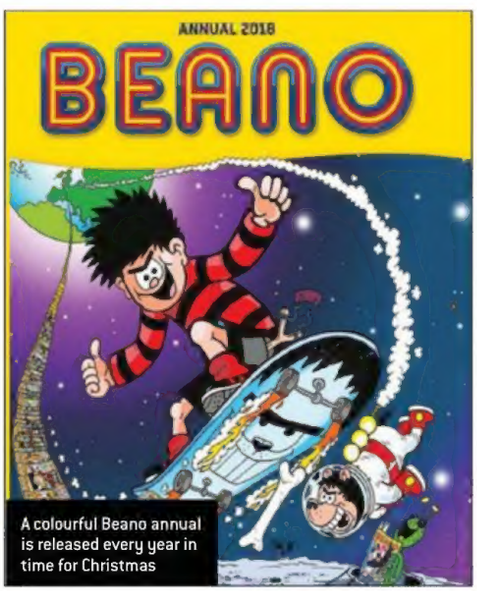
That said, after 80 years *The Beano* holds a huge place in the British public's collective psyche. "There's obviously a lot of nostalgia," says Stirling. "We see that in the high sales of our Christmas annuals; they're often bought as novelty gifts for grown-ups.

"Adults like to see children reading *The Beano* because they have such fond memories of it themselves," Stirling continues, "and sometimes those adults pass their old comics or the annuals on to younger members of the family, and they never fail to enjoy them." But tastes and methods of consumption change, and comics have never had more competition for the time and attention of children, which is why *The Beano* is now expanding its online and media offerings.

"Kids today are a lot more sophisticated," says Stirling, "and we have to reflect that." And while the days of Dennis the Menace getting a solid slippering from an angry dad at the end of an adventure are long gone, the strips still strike a balance between morality and fun.

Stirling says, "Children can live out their own misadventures vicariously through the characters, but they also see that there are boundaries to behaviour… just not a slipper these days! By the same token, characters like Dennis also show the sort of silly behaviour that parents and adults can do, which kids like.

"*The Beano* is often a child's first step into reading comics, and later they'll move on to other things like, for example, *2000AD*. What we're doing now is growing audiences and making the comic itself stronger, and that's good for us and good for comics in general."



A colourful Beano annual is released every year in time for Christmas

Evil Laugh racks up the view counts on their YouTube channel

TELL-ALL TAKEI

New graphic novel explores a part of America's forgotten history

Executive Order 9066 is a part of American history that's often forgotten or swept under the rug, but George Takei is going to tell his story of the events in an upcoming graphic novel.

Takei has signed a deal with IDW Publishing to produce an autobiographical comic on the Japanese American internment camps during World War II, the book will be created with Takei's guidance, working as a narrator he will share his family's experiences. He hopes that through his book, he can inspire people and encourage positive change.

George Takei is best known for his role as Hikaru Sulu in the TV and film series *Star Trek*, where he portrayed the character from 1966 to 1996. Today, he is an activist of human rights. "I have spoken publicly on numerous occasions during my life on the unjust internment of Japanese Americans in my ongoing mission of spreading awareness of this disgraceful chapter of American history" Takei explains. "I do this, and will continue to do so, in the hope that my personal experience can serve as a cautionary reminder of our past leaders' mistakes, and that we can learn from those transgressions and not repeat them."

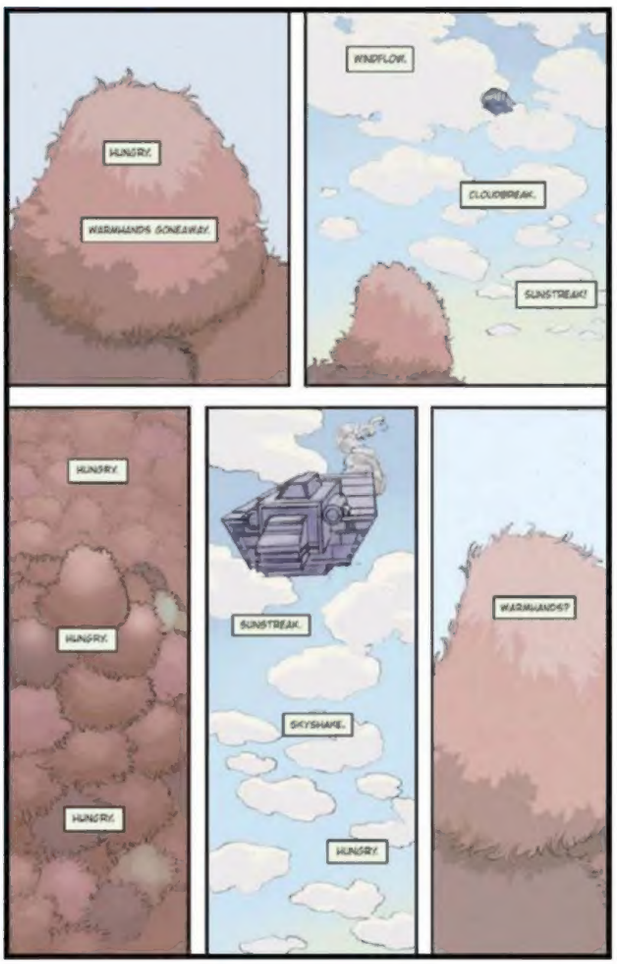
Executive order 9066 was signed in 1942 in response to the bombing of Pearl Harbour, this led to around 120,000 innocent men, women and children of Japanese descent being taken to internment camps around the country. Takei was taken at the age of five, along with his family to one of these camps. The book will follow him through his family's confinement inside the camps, having to start their lives over after being released, as well as Takei's rise to pop-culture icon.

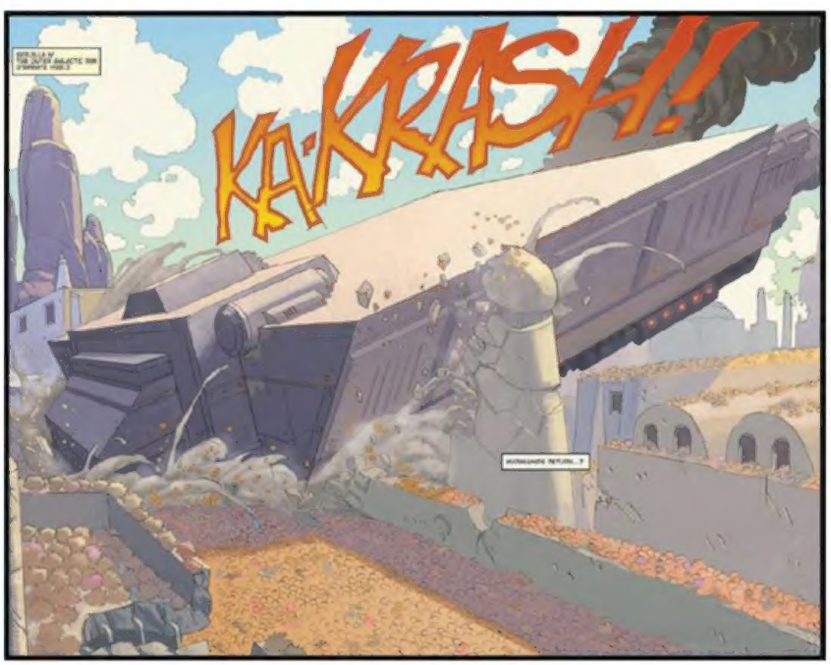
Takei was motivated by the possibility to reach a new audience through the comic book format. "When the opportunity to tell my story in the form of a graphic novel presented itself, I recognised the value in making it easily accessible for our youth to discover and digest the material, bringing attention to an important and relevant issue, while preserving it for generations to come."

The graphic novel has yet to be given a title but Justin Elsinger and Steven Scott will handle scripting and the artist will be named at some point in the very near future.

George Takei's graphic novel is set to be published in 2018.

Above: George Takei will act as a guide for the graphic novel
Right: Takei is no stranger to comics, having starred in plenty of *Star Trek* ones





> **"MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE CAN SERVE AS A CAUTIONARY REMINDER OF OUR PAST LEADERS' MISTAKES"**

GIRL WITH THE COMIC BOOK

Aiden Dalby talks to the creators of the newest adaptation of Stieg Larrson's famed novels

Above: Runberg and Homs bring Larssons' creation to a new medium with the rest of the series planned
Right: Homs chose an expressive art form for his interpretation

The novel is a worldwide bestseller. Were you thinking about that going into the project?
Sylvain Runberg: No, I never thought about that aspect during writing. In 2010 I talked to Dupuis about my desire to make an adaptation of Stieg Larsson's novels, and they were already successful. I already had in mind what I wanted to do during this adaptation through these main characters, Lisbeth Salander, Mikaël Blomkvist and Erika Berger, and the themes that interested me in novels: the new rise of the Far-right politics, feminism, the media. And more generally, I write above all for myself, without thinking of the readers. It is for me the only way to honestly approach a narrative.

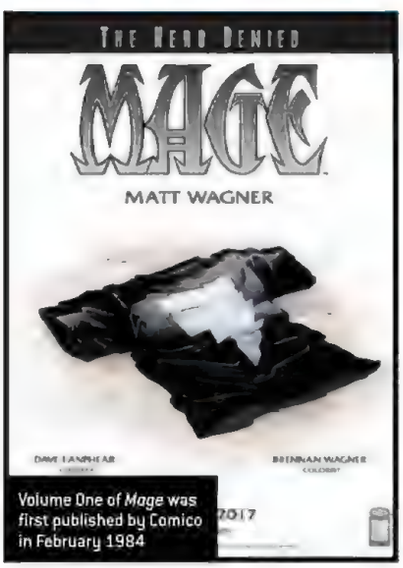
Are there any advantages that the comic medium has over novels? What will the comic bring to the story?
SR: First, there is a whole graphic aspect around the city of Stockholm, which is also one of the characters of this story. Stockholm is a beautiful, colourful city, with an omnipresent nature, and I wanted to have that aspect, in complete contrast with the darkness of the story. I put the story back in the current Stockholm, which has changed a lot compared to the time when Stieg Larsson wrote the novels. And of course, there is no budget limit in a comic. It is also always a great plus for the staging choices!

Jose, did you watch the film adaptation in preparation for the book?
Jose Homs: I had read the books and had seen the Swedish films. The film version of David Fincher had not yet been released; it was two or three months before it was released, but I preferred not to see it (although I really like Fincher's movies) so as not to pollute the adaptation too much and be able to design both characters and scenarios in my way as I imagined them when I read the novels.

The style of art uses very expressive faces – was this chosen for a reason?
JH: When I received the proposal from the publisher to participate in this project, they gave me absolute freedom in terms of drawing style. From the start, it was important to approach the adaptation from a personal point of view and endow it with personality to avoid doing something soulless.

Girl With The Dragon Tattoo is available now from Titan Comics.

HITTING IT OUT THE PARK



Volume One of *Mage* was first published by Comico in February 1984

Mage creator Matt Wagner talks to **Joel Meadows** about his return to the series

29 years is a long time in comics. Matt Wagner created the first *Mage* series, *The Hero Discovered*, back in the 1980s, and its sequel, *The Hero Defined*, only came out at the end of the 1990s. Now, 18 years after the second volume, 2017 sees the release of *Mage: The Hero Denied*, a 15-part series published again by Image that will wrap up the creator's tale of Kevin Matchstick.

Launching with a zero issue at this year's San Diego Comic Con in July, Wagner gave a few extra details to us when we spoke to him back in May.

"It takes up about ten years after the conclusion of *The Hero Defined*. Kevin's at a very different point in his life...but then the same dark forces arise to once again draw him into The Struggle. More than that...we'll just have to leave as a surprise," Wagner said.

Nearly 30 years is a very long time and he is the first to admit that there is no way he could have stayed the same as a person and as a creator after such a lengthy period.

"It's just a natural progression of my growth as an artist. I'd find it boring as hell if my style was the exact same now as it was when I started *Mage* over 30 years ago. That said, to my eye, the differences aren't that jarring. Each volume of the trilogy is obviously done by the same guy telling the same kind of story...just at different stages of his life."

BACK TO HELL

Joel Meadows chats to Tank Girl artist Warwick Johnson Cadwell about his team-up with Hellboy's Mike Mignola

A new project from Hellboy creator Mike Mignola is always worth checking out. Mr Higgins Comes Home is a new oneshot graphic novel to be published by Dark Horse this October. Mignola is writing it but joining him on art is British artist Warwick Johnson Cadwell (*Tank Girl*).

The seed of the project began at a comics show over here in England last year, Cadwell informed us. "I was fortunate enough to be on a Sketch Panel at the Thought Bubble Festival in Leeds last year. Mike was also on the panel and we had the opportunity to meet briefly afterward. He suggested we should do a story together which I thought was far too good to be true but he contacted me a week or so later with a story in mind, which still sounds too good to be true."

Mignola has been a huge influence on the artist for many years, he tells us, "Not sure at which point to start with that one. He has always been a massive influence and inspiration to me. I have a worn out [French] copy of the Wolverine story *Jungle Adventure* and thoroughly knackered issues of his Topps *Dracula* adaption that were constant references for me and feel now that they were a solid foundation of how I ended up drawing the way I do. He is a master of the craft. And in writing too as it turned out."

Mignola said this about the artist when it was announced in April of this year. "I'd been a fan of Warwick's work for a very long time," And in a previous statement. "I met him recently, discovered he had a fondness for sad werewolves, and that got the ball rolling for *Mr Higgins*."

Even though they are based in different countries, the pair have worked quite closely with each. "He emailed his ideas which I loved and I sent him drawings, which he said he loved, I followed the writer's lead as is often the case for me. Working out stories with people is such an exhilarating experience but add to that the fact I'm working with a hero of mine really made it something amazing," Cadwell says.

The project has come from a mutual love of horror stories. "I think this has a unique feel. A collaboration brings out something more than the elements involved, maybe like a third creator that isn't seen again unless the same people are involved. *Mr Higgins Comes Home* is a story that comes very much from shared interests I think. A love of a kind of traditional or 'olde worlde' horror that we find in America's Universal Studios horror movies or the British Hammer Horror films. I feel that we both are inclined not to stretch the boundaries of the genre but instead immerse ourselves in the rules and the lore and thoroughly enjoy doing that." CH

Mr Higgins Comes Home will arrive in comic book stores on 25 October, and eventually reach larger bookstores, appropriately enough, on 31 October.

Right Migno a attended a gallery of art inspired by his work

> "THE FACT THAT I'M WORKING WITH A HERO OF MINE REALLY MADE IT SOMETHING AMAZING"

CHAPTERHOUSE AND BARUCHEL JOIN FORCES

The Canadian publisher is teaming-up with actor Jay Baruchel from How To Train Your Dragon

Actor Jay Baruchel has joined Chapterhouse as part owner and Chief Creative Officer of the Toronto-based publisher. "It's the best thing ever, it's such a cool thing to have to work – using fingers for air-quotes – approving super heroes and coming up with crazy story arcs," Baruchel enthusiastically explains.

Chapterhouse launched in 2015 after its CEO Fadi Hakim wanted to use the Canadian superhero Captain Canuck's image on his restaurant's menu. After buying the licence for the character from its creator Richard Comely, he got a team together to re-imagine the character, launch an animated web-series and eventually a comic. The partnership with Baruchel stemmed from discussions he had with Chapterhouse about putting together a Captain Canuck film. "They asked me to write a movie and five days later I came back to them with a decade-long vision for the company and asked if I could invest."

The publisher and Baruchel are both proud to be Canadian, which is what drew him to Hakim, as Hakim explains. "He's unabashedly Canadian – being a Hollywood star but living in Toronto when Hollywood is where a lot of his friends are, is kind of a big thing." Baruchel and Hakim share a goal of wanting to make superheroes and stories for everyone, feeling some people aren't represented as well as they should be. Baruchel says, "We want to have superheroes that are uncommon and diverse, we want to make heroes that the big two [publishers] don't necessarily have the balls to. So our characters run the gambit ethnically and religiously; genders are equally represented and so are sexual orientations."

He continues. "I think there are a bunch of kids in Canada, in the UK, in Australia and in the States who grow up not of the majority culture, and I think that those kids are underserved, those kids should be able to see superheroes that look like them."

Chapterhouse wants to present stories that Canadian kids can relate to; when the superheroes are fighting, it's not on the streets of Manhattan but across Yorkville. Baruchel hopes that his name can bring in new readers who may have once looked past the *Captain Canuck* or *Pitiful Human Lizard* titles and see that there are talented writers and artists not just in the States but also in their backyard. While still working on movies, he has also been co-writing on the *Captain Canuck: Year One* mini-series as well as working on other unannounced titles. "Writing *Year One* has been this nice, beautiful, liberating era; it's restored my faith in writing in a way because there's something incredibly pure and honest about it," says Baruchel.

The future looks bright for Chapterhouse as they have also announced a partnership with Diamond Books, who will distribute their trades across North America and Europe. These books will be new trades as well as archived classics. Hakim elaborates, "We'll have approximately 26 books released by the end of this year through Diamond and in 2018 we're looking to double that in terms of trades."

Captain Canuck: Year One #2 will be published by Chapterhouse this autumn 2017

CHAPTERHOUSE

Above: Baruchel's films include *Tropic Thunder* and *Knocked Up*

> "FIVE DAYS LATER I CAME BACK TO THEM WITH A DECADE-LONG VISION FOR THE COMPANY"

TREASURY OF BRITAIN

Classic titles and much-loved characters return in this unmissable collection of reprints

From grizzled New York cop *One-Eyed Jack* to malleable mimic *Faceache*, the inaugural offerings from Rebellion's new Treasury of British Comics imprint couldn't be more varied. The first classic stories to see the light of day following the *2000AD* publisher's purchasing of the Fleetway and IPC Youth Group's plentiful archive of 1970s and 1980s comics, they are drawn from titles such as *Buster, Misty, Valiant* and *Scream!*

"There were several reasons for choosing the first stories to reprint," says editor Keith Richardson. "Some work was selected because I was already familiar with it, and some material was picked because of the creators involved. There were a few strips that I had never read before and was absolutely delighted to find, and *The Sentinels* from *Misty* falls into that category."

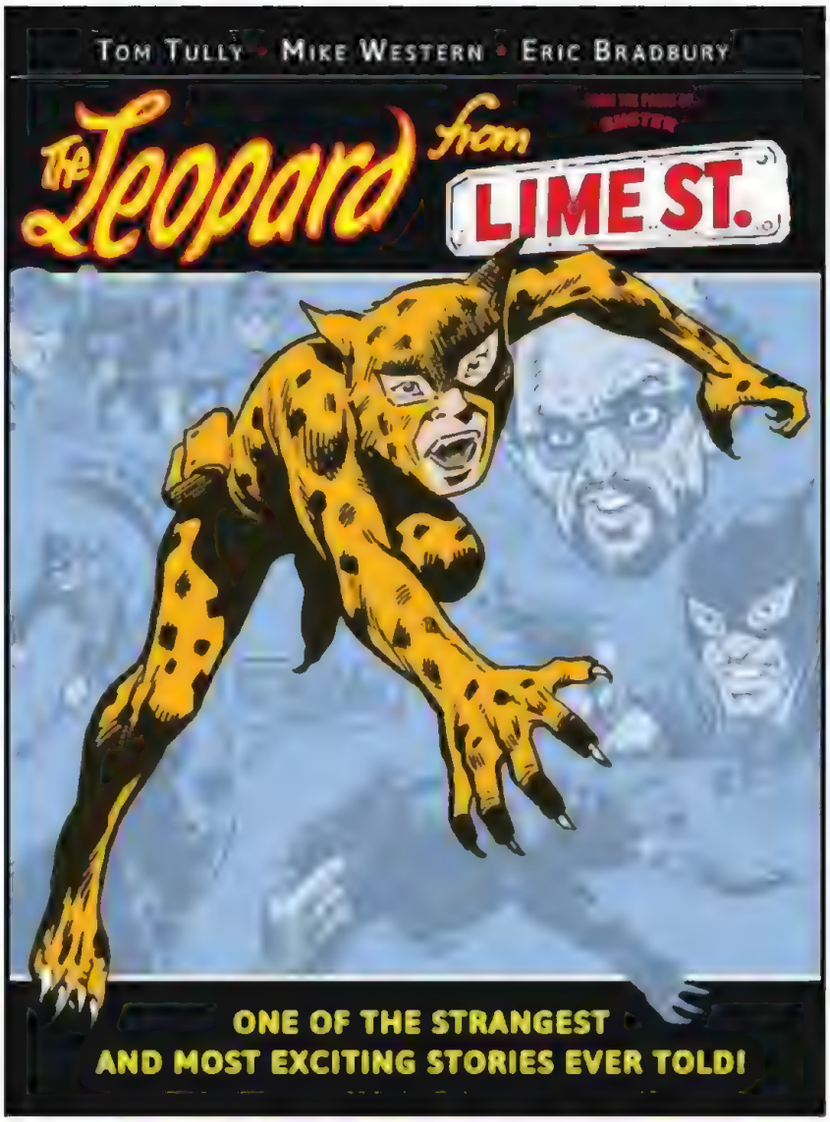
As one of the crucial antecedents of *Judge Dredd*, there was probably no better place to launch the Treasury of British Comics than June's publication of *One-Eyed Jack*. Written by Old Stoney Face co-creator John Wagner and drawn by John Cooper, the *Dirty Harry*-inspired police detective Jack McBain's increasingly violent exploits first appeared in *Valiant* in 1975. With McBain becoming a US military intelligence operative, they continued following the merger with *Battle Picture Weekly* in 1976, although those episodes are being saved for a later edition. "Jack was familiar territory for us, being the custodians of *Judge Dredd*," says Richardson. "It's a quality strip as well, but you wouldn't expect anything less from John Wagner."

Arriving just in time for this month's *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, *The Leopard From Lime Street* has been hailed as the UK's answer to Marvel's web-spinner, and is certainly one of the first British superheroes. One of humour-centred weekly *Buster*'s few serious-minded stories, it was written by Tom Tully and illustrated by Mike Western and Eric Bradbury. Turning to crime-fighting after being bitten by a radioactive leopard, teenager Billy Farmer's numerous cat-like abilities included super-speed and strength as well as a penchant for climbing trees. Like Peter Parker, he even takes photos of himself in action, which he then sells to the local newspaper.

"I would describe *Spider-Man* as the American *Leopard From Lime Street!*" laughs Richardson. "I loved this strip growing up, although it was a real oddity in *Buster*, as the rest of the comic was populated with funny strips. Eric Bradbury and Mike Western's art is phenomenal, and really eye-watering. The marketplace now is dominated by the superhero genre, so it's good to have a little skin in that game. Also, since announcing our acquisition of the Egmont archive, it has probably been our most requested strip to reprint. The fact that it is coming out around the same time as the new Spidey movie was pure serendipity."

Once again originating from *Buster*, September's *Marney the Fox* is not as well known, and according to Richardson, the Scott Goodall-written strip could be viewed as one of Fleetway's forgotten gems, if only for John Stokes' impressive art. "*Marney the Fox* is a simple, yet beautiful story, similar to *Watership Down* and *Tarka The Otter*," he says. "The story is about a young fox cub called Marney, who has

> "THE LEOPARD FROM LIME STREET HAS BEEN HAILED AS THE UK'S ANSWER TO MARVEL'S WEB-SPINNER"



"THE BEST ARTWORK TO EVER APPEAR IN BRITISH COMICS"

to survive in a world where he has been separated from his mother and siblings. The big draw here is John Stokes' artwork, and the insane amount of detail in every panel is a joy to look at. In my opinion, it is his best work and some of the best artwork to ever appear in British comics. It deserves to be seen by more people, and I hope it does well."

Following on from last year's *Monster* and *Moonchild/Four Faces of Eve* volumes from *Scream!* and *Misty* respectively, Rebellion will again be rooting through Fleetway's horror comics vault in the autumn. First up in October from *Scream!*, *The Dracula File* by Gerry Finley-Day and Eric Bradbury, with additional material by *Death's Head* creators Simon Furman and Geoff Senior (although not together), chronicles the bloodsucking count's journey through 1980s Britain. Then in November, *Misty Volume 2* will showcase Malcolm Shaw and Mario Capaldi's *The Sentinels*, which partly takes place in a dystopian Britain where the Nazis won the Second World War, and *End of the Line*, which was most probably also written by Shaw and drawn by John Richardson, and was a story that involved time travel on the London Underground.

"The *Monster* and *Misty* collections were well received last year, but that isn't the primary reason why we've decided to release *The Dracula File* and *The Sentinels/End of the Line*," reasons Richardson. "*Scream!* was my favourite comic growing up, so collections from that most unholy of tomes are never far from my mind. And Bram Stoker's great novel *Dracula* is 120 years young this year, which is a nice anniversary to hang this release on. As for *The Sentinels*, what a story! *Misty* in general is a title that I was never familiar with, but have grown to love since the acquisition, so expect even more *Misty* in the future."

Rounding out the year in December is Ken Reid's *Faceache*, which centres around incorrigible schoolboy Ricky Rubberneck, who boasts a 'bendable bonce' that he can stretch to resemble other people. The creator of *Roger the Dodger* over at *The Beano*, Reid ranks up there with *Minnie the Minx/The Bash Street Kids'* Leo Baxendale, and *Faceache* – which debuted in *Jet* in 1971 before moving to *Buster* – is perhaps the pinnacle of his Fleetway work. "For me, Ken Reid is the best cartoonist hands down," says Richardson. "So inventive and so humorous, Ken is still unsurpassed in his field. I was shocked that there aren't already volumes of his work already collected up and selling up and down the country."

Despite their immense popularity and obvious links to *2000AD*, The Treasury of British Comics doesn't include any stories from *Battle Picture Library* or *Action*, for the time being at least. "We haven't released any *Battle/Action* material yet, but that is mainly because Titan still had a licence for that," says Richardson. "But fans of both titles will be excited by our 2018 schedule though!"

Above: Fans of Marvel's *Spider-Man* are certainly going to want to check out the *Leopard From Lime Street* classic – is the treasury – we'd choose eopard ab lities over a sp der s any day

KIRBY: KING OF COMICS

Aiden Dalby speaks to Mark Evanier about his award-winning biography, Kirby: King Of Comics

Mark Evanier, writer, historian and former assistant to Jack Kirby has tweaked his biography of the legendary artist. Originally published by Abrams Books in 2008, Mark has amended parts of the text, adding a new chapter and foreword, as well as newly found art.

Kirby: King Of Comics is part coffee-table art book and part biography. What made you decide to go with this format?

I had a lot of Kirby artwork that I thought should be preserved. The material dictated the form; Jack was a guy who span an incredible series of decades doing great artwork and it was fascinating to a lot of people to see it chronicled that way. You could see the evolution of his style – even late in his career he was still innovating and doing incredible work. That was one of the main messages that I wanted people to get out of the book – not 'hey this guy did some great comic books' but 'hey, this guy drew some great comics in the '40s, and he drew them in the '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s.'

I hope one of the things people take away from anything I or anyone else writes about Jack is what a hard worker he was. When you get to be proficient in comics there's a great temptation to coast and reuse stock poses and plots and keep drawing the same figures over and over again to have one set of action poses and dress the character in whatever costume. Jack didn't do that.

You mention in the book that Jack asked you to document his work for a biography.

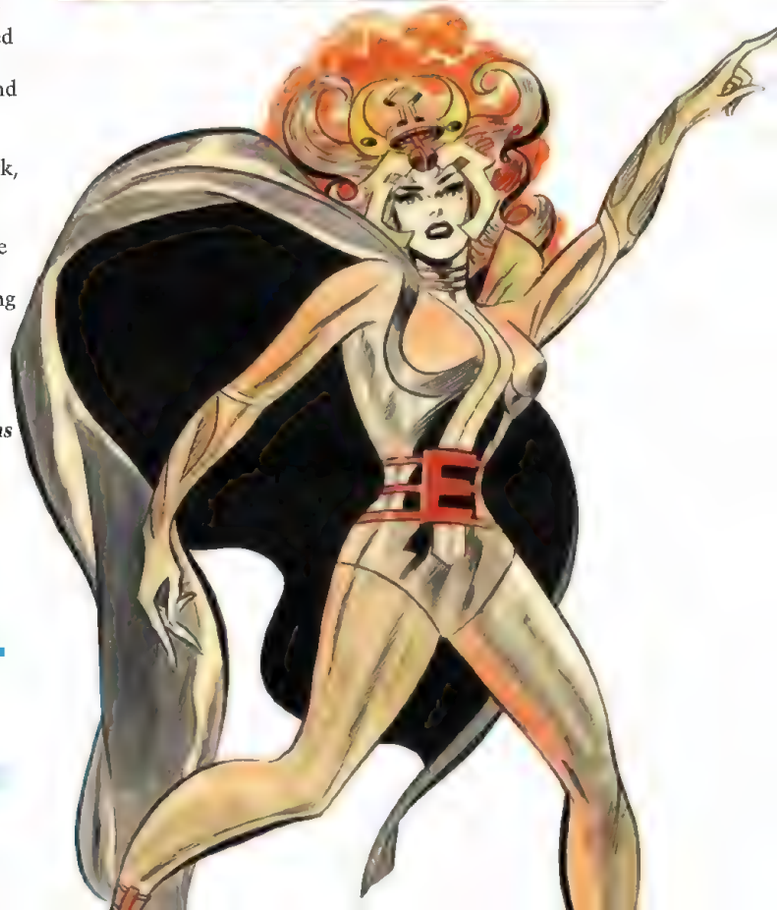
When I first met Jack he was impressed that I knew a lot about comic book history. I was 17 at the time and this was 1969, there wasn't a lot written about the history of comics. What's interesting is he never said to me, "This is what I want you to write." He never tried to shape the truth, nothing was off limits. Jack always believed that he would do very well if he just told the truth, so I kept notes on a lot of things and wrote a lot of articles over the years. It never seemed to be the right time to write a large book about him because he was still vital and ongoing that I didn't have the whole story.

Jack was very much of the present and also the future; one of the most interesting things about him was what he was going to do next. After he died, Roz, his wonderful wife, said to me, "I want you to write a big book about him some day." She didn't say tomorrow, didn't say next week, and she said I could have access to anything I wanted, all the files and papers, and she would answer all my questions, so I began to do that.

What could the artists of today learn from studying Jack Kirby?

I tell people that if I had emerged from my association with Jack able to draw just like him he would have considered me a failure because he didn't want people imitating his stylistic works and have their drawings mistaken for Kirby's. He wanted people to understand the energy behind the work, the thought behind it and the passion behind his work, and take all of that and do work that's unique to them. He loved the new talented people that emerged in his lifespan who were doing Kirby without doing Kirby.

Kirby: King of Comics (Anniversary Edition) by Mark Evanier and introduction by Neil Gaiman (Abrams ComicArts, out 1August for £17.99)



> "WHEN YOU GET TO BE PROFICIENT IN COMICS THERE'S A TEMPTATION TO COAST. JACK DIDN'T DO THAT"

KA-PUNCH!

A COMIC BY MARC JACKSON

YOU REALLY SCREWED UP MY DAY LAST TIME, SONNY! I ENDED UP HAVING TO DO OVERTIME AND EXTRA PAPERWORK
HEY, DON'T BLAME ME DOC! THE HEALTH SERVICE IS ALWAYS IN A MESS!!
JUST LIKE YOUR FACE WILL BE WHEN I'M FINISHED WITH YOU, SONNY!
KA-BOOOF!
KARASH!
OOOF!

GIMME A BREAK, DOC! WE NEED TO GO BACK OUTSIDE!
WE'RE TRASHING MY PARENTS' HOUSE!
69
NO CHANCE!! YOU BROKE MY PHYSICIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD, PLUS ALL THE ACTION FIGURES ON MY DESK.
THIS... IS PAY BACK!!
OH, YEAH?
68
WALLY! WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE?
WHAT'S ALL THE RUCKUS?
UH-OH, IT'S MY DAD!
TAKE YOUR MASK OFF DOC, HE'LL THINK YOU'RE A NUT-JOB!
67

OH, SORRY, IT'S YOU DOC! WHAT'S GOING ON?
UMMMMMNNN.. I WAS MAKING HOUSE-CALLS. SO I BROUGHT YOUR PRESCRIPTION, MR WAFFLE!
THE CREAM FOR THE RASH ON YOUR BUT..
66
WOAH! EASY, THERE DOC!!
ERRRRR... I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, BUT THANKS FOR COMING OUT!!
BUT, BUT, BUT...
AHEM!
SO, WHO WANTS TO GO OUT FOR FISH TACOS? MY TREAT!
YES! FISH TACOS!
SLAM!!!
65

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ABOUT LEAH
Leah Moore is a writer of comics, prose and journalism, as well as the co-founder of the revolutionary *Electricomics*. She has written for *Albion*, *Wild Girls*, *Tom Strong* and more. Follow her on Twitter at **@leahmoore**.

Leo Baxendale

When they find out that you work in comics, the first thing British people will say to you is, "Ooh like *The Beano*?" and then you say, "Yeah, sort of, but more like *Batman*," and they say "Ooh, you write *Batman*?!" and then you say "No, no I don't. I doubt I ever will. Oh god. Can we just forget this ever happened please?" or words to that effect.

This has always given me a pain, not just because I will likely never write *Batman*, but because it feels disloyal to British kids comics to distance myself from them at each such encounter.

I absolutely *lived* for my comics when I was a child. My nan would buy me them and I would get them and a tube of Smarties on a Saturday and sit and demolish them in one sitting. I read *Twinkle*, and *Button* and *Beano* and the *Dandy*, and *Beezer*, *Buster*, *Whizzer* and *Chips* you name it, I devoured them all.

My collection grew and grew, and lived in a pile on the shelf directly above my bed. At night, I would reach up and carefully tease out an issue to read, and nine times out of ten I would then lay there reading my comic. Every tenth time, however, my whole collection would fall and engulf me.

Most of the comics I would have to dig my way out of contained the work of, or characters created by the late, great Leo Baxendale.

Leo Baxendale was a genius, and I use the word advisedly. His comics brimmed with hyperactive eccentricity and irreverence. A Baxendale drawing was anarchy personified, from the nostrils outwards, you could tell his characters didn't give a fig for

"My collection grew and grew, and lived in a pile on the shelf directly above my bed"

authority of any kind. The best thing that could happen was a free for all, where a location was overrun with figures all busily engaged in mischief and mayhem, involving complex Heath Robinson style devices whereby a tin of paint or bag of marbles was inventively deployed to devastating effect. The children that he drew were all so believably weird looking, with sticky out teeth and crossed eyes, jam jar glasses and knobbly knees, they were unkempt and insane.

As he moved from one company to the next, his characters would be drawn by new artists, but nobody could capture the mania of his character's expressions, the vitality of his line, or the sheer inventiveness of his work.

When I became a paid-up Pig Pack member, reading *Oink*, later on, the things I loved about it were the things Baxendale had done all those years before. I loved Jeremy Banx's gross hero Burp the Alien and *Horace* by Tony Husband, and I really loved *Tom Thug* and *Pete And His Pimple* by Lew Stringer. Lew has a clean bouncy line and all of the sight gags and background details a Baxendale fan would recognise and love. He does some work for the Beano now, on Baxendale's characters and seeing the obvious enjoyment that he gets from drawing in all the smelly socks, sticking plasters, marbles and ice cream cornets is a real treat.

On 23 April 2017 Leo Baxendale died, aged 86. I met him only once, when I was little, and he was tall and funny and nice.

I don't know if we will see his like again, but buying our children all the comics we can lay hands on, supporting the people who make them, and encouraging our children to be weird and goofy and inventive and anarchic, and eat big piles of bangers and mash seems like the best kind of tribute to the man.

Girl With The Dragon Tattoo

Facing prison time, Mikael Blomkvist is hired to investigate an unresolved family disappearance. Aided by computer hacker Lisabeth Salander, they soon discover a trail of murder, deception and dark secrets. Presenting a new vision of Stieg Larsson's much-loved series, *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* is a serialised comic book adaptation of Lisbeth's story. Written by Sylvain Runberg, illustrated by José Homs and translated by Rachel Zerner, the comic tells story of violence and cruelty, family secrets and international intrigue. On sale from Titan Comics now.

POLICE!
FREEZE! NOW!
FIRST TIME IN 11 YEARS THAT HE DIDN'T SHOW UP TO A MEETING...
THAT'S WHY I CAME TO HIS HOUSE.
THAT'S WHY...
GODDAMN PIGS! WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?
THIS MAN IS MY LEGAL GUARDIAN. I'M TRYING TO CALL A FUCKING AMBULANCE!!

COURTESY OF TITAN COMICS

Robotech

The all-new Robotech comic series returns to Macross Island, the place where it all began! Writer Brian Wood, artist Marco Turini and colourist Marco Lesko have crafted a thrilling new tale that's perfectly accessible to new fans, as well as providing a deeper layer of twists for old-school protoculture addicts.

First airing in the USA in 1985, Robotech was the gateway to anime for many fans – capturing their imagination with its epic generational storyline involving war, romance, and, of course, the transforming Veritech fighters that defend the Earth against extra-terrestrial attacks.

COURTESY OF TITAN COMICS

The Death of Stalin

Fear, corruption and treachery abound in this political satire set in the aftermath of Stalin's death in the Soviet Union in 1953. When the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, has a stroke, the political gears began to turn, plunging the infamous super-state into darkness, uncertainty and near civil war. The struggle for supreme power will determine the fate of the nation and of the world. And it all really happened.

COURTESY OF TITAN COMICS

SHAPERS OF WORLDS

RAPID-FIRE Q&As WITH COMIC CREATORS

FRANK QUITELY

Renowned as one of Britain's greatest comic-book artists, **Joel Meadows** talks to the Scot about his latest work

IMAGES © JOEL MEADOWS

Frank Quitely is one of the most highly regarded British comics artists of the past 30 years. Starting his career on Scottish indie comic *Electric Soup*, Quitely (real name Vincent Deighan) soon moved onto the *Judge Dredd Megazine* on strips like *Shimura* and *Missionary Man*. He then began a collaboration with fellow Scottish superstar Grant Morrison on titles like *We3* for Vertigo and the acclaimed *All-Star Superman* for DC. He worked with Morrison again on *X-Men* for Marvel and over the past few years, he has collaborated regularly with fellow Scottish writer Mark Millar on *Jupiter's Legacy* for Image Comics. 2017 is a significant year for the artist as a major exhibition of his work has just opened at the Kelvingrove Gallery in Glasgow, Frank Quitely: The Art Of Comics. *Comic Heroes* caught up with him to find out about looking back at a 30-year career, working with Grant Morrison and Mark Millar, why the conclusion of *Jupiter's Legacy* is a little late and more...

So you are finishing off the latest issue of *Jupiter's Legacy*, with Mark Millar. But it is quite late, so what's caused you to go off schedule?

It's monstrously late. I think it's more than a year late. It's partly because I think Mark had hoped that if we started publishing when I was more than halfway through it we would be on schedule. But various things have happened in between. One of them was I got a slight recurrence of my back injuries. Another was that I tore a ligament off my thumb when I was paintballing. I had to get an operation to get it screwed back onto the bone. That slowed me down a wee bit. A lot of it was just the sheer number of hospital appointments and pre-op stuff. And then another thing was the exhibition at Kelvingrove.

What was the genesis of the exhibition at Kelvingrove?

The conversation started two and a half years ago. What happened was that a couple of people high up in Glasgow museums saw the BBC documentary *What Do Artists Do All Day?* So they had a meeting and asked if anybody knows anything about comics. So the guy who eventually curated the show, Martin Craig, said, "Not only do I know a bit about comics, but I know that guy as well".

We were thinking we could do something that went from grass roots right up to Mark [Millar] and Grant [Morrison] for instance. We'd probably get Wagner and Grant involved in terms of the *2000AD* story too. We thought about having Eddie Campbell involved as that's something that's very different to what most of the rest of us are doing. In terms of the timescale and

Below: Quitely is best known for his collaborative work on the stories of much-loved characters from Superman and Batman to the X-Men

> Kelvingrove was my favourite place to go for a family day out... It never occurred to me that I would one day have a single piece in there, never mind an exhibition

the space and the gallery, it would have been too difficult if it had too many focuses. So eventually it came back to the idea of basing it around me because I'd worked with Wagner, Grant, Gordon Rennie and Robbie Morrison, Grant Morrison and Mark Millar. So that would take in my own independent stuff, stuff that I did with 2000AD and the stuff that I did with the Paradox Big Books, the Vertigo anthologies, big mainstream titles and creator-owned stuff, so it would cover a little bit of everything.

Does it feel weird having your work in Kelvingrove?

Yes it does. Kelvingrove was literally my favourite place to go for a family day out. And this is true of a lot of kids in Glasgow. So all my life I've been going there and because I've been doing comic art rather than fine art, it never occurred to me that I would one day have a single piece in there, never mind a whole exhibition.

You have worked with both Grant Morrison and Mark Millar. Do you see the difference between the way that they work?

Mark writes a simple script that's got enough detail and leaves me quite a bit of room to do my own thing as well. Sometimes he suggests camera angles, and with most writers if they suggest camera angles I'll try that first. I'll stick with it unless it's getting in the way of my narrative flow. Generally, if I am working with both, we meet and talk about it, which is easy because they are both local. With Grant, *Flex Mentallo* was full script, enough detail, with enough room for me to manoeuvre. He told me after it that he'd chosen me partly because he liked the way I drew, but also because he knew I wasn't really a fan boy, so if he was making veiled references to things in comics I wasn't going to make it too obvious because I wasn't that interested. Grant does thumbnails for himself and he'll occasionally show me after I've done my work.

Are there any plans to do any more *Jupiter's Legacy* after this current series ends?

I am happy to work with Mark again but I don't know what his plans are for what's happening next.

FRANK QUITELY: THE ART OF COMICS

It is quite an accolade for a comic artist's work to be celebrated in such a distinguished setting, but it makes sense that Quitely's career is commended in this way. Starting off with his work on Scottish independent comic *Electric Soup* in the early 1990s, it makes its way through his work on *Judge Dredd Megazine*, *All-Star Superman*, *Flex Mentallo* and *X-Men*, covering his more recent collaborations with Mark Millar on *Jupiter's Legacy*. We get to see his pencils, his cover work and also a sense of how he has evolved as an artist. There is something dynamic and idiosyncratic about his work so you know instantly that it is something drawn by him. 'Frank Quitely: The Art of Comics' gives a glimpse into the mindset of one of modern comics' most distinctive artists.

The exhibition will be open until 1 October at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, with prices ranging from £3-7.

OWEN JOHNSON

Alasdair Stuart talks to indie creator Owen Johnson about why semi-autobiographical was the way to go

Owen Johnson is one of the most prolific creators working on the UK indie scene. He's always pushing the envelope on what's expected of comics. Recently, he's focus on two projects; *Reel Love* and *Beast Wagon*. The first is a semi-autobiographical look at his love of film, the second is a zoological black comedy. I talked to him about comics, cinema, creativity and what's next.

What led you to comics?

I've always been receptive to visual storytelling. Most of the children's books I grew up reading were illustrated. *Where The Wild Things Are* by Sendak, *Not Now Bernard* by David McKee, *We're Going On A Bear Hunt* by Rosen and Oxenbury. As a child I assumed Quentin Blake as responsible as Roald Dahl for *Fantastic Mr. Fox* and *The BFG*. The whole vault of Disney animation and around that time my grandma got Cartoon Network. Saturday morning cartoons were really coming into their own with classics like the *Batman Animated Series* and *Thundercats*, along with the less superhero-oriented fare like *Hey Arnold* and *Dexter's Lab*. I played a lot of video games and watched Ray Harryhausen movies. Around this time *The Beano* was the first comic I read, it just became a part of the fabric of your life.

And what led you to start creating your own comics?

I had some anger/behaviour problems as a lad until I changed schools and met a kid who drew comics of his own. It was a revelation. Gave me a real channel for my energy. We made a pirate comic visually styled after *The Bash Street Kids*. Things got serious when I reached grammar school in Cumbria. I started visiting cons up in Scotland, which has such a wonderful, supportive comics community. I was working on *Rookie* and *Myth Mobs* – black and white mini-comics about violent superheroes and Greek gods as depression-era gangsters. All horribly derivative and the art traced from Jim Lee and whoever was big in capes comics at the time. I sold those mini-comics in the school canteen at lunch. Convincing people to buy a new issue instead of a bacon sandwich. Not a great deal has changed if I'm perfectly honest.

Tell us about *Reel Love*.

Reel Love is my debut graphic novel. It's about a young boy who forms a relationship with his local cinema and follows his dreams of becoming a famous film director. Told in three acts, each takes place over a British summer and chronicles the triumphs and heartbreaks of being young, and being obsessed with the movies. It's semi-autobiographical but with fantasy flourishes. *Reel Love* is also lettered by my long-time collaborator Colin Bell, and is now funding with Unbound.

What were the challenges in depicting cinema on the page?

Ironically, there is far less required to make a comic (pen and paper) than the hundreds required to make a professional looking film. Film is built on the concept and governed by time, whereas comics are built on the function of physical space. You can never replicate film on the comic page, you're missing sound and movement. But I'm not trying to make a comic about how cinema physically works, but psychologically and imaginatively works. What I can do, through my characters, is express how I felt, my experience of this ritual communal experience. I think that's all you can ever do.

In *Reel Love* you follow your love of film evolving as the story goes on. Is that continued?

Of course! The narrative voice of

Below: Along with *Reel Love*, Johnson is busy with *Beast Wagon*

IMAGES COURTESY OF MONKEYBRAIN COMICS

'cinema' that runs through the story is a big part of that. The first chapter is about falling in love with the medium. The teenage years chart the disillusionment and rejection. The final chapter is about coming home again. It was intentional to have the film fantasies become less marked as the character gets older. The movies become absorbed, integrated into the way he views the world.

Tell us about your artistic process.
A constant state of anxiety! Everything goes in a project unique notebook: sketches, dialogue, ideas. This looks like the diary of a sociopath. I'll then write a script as I would for an artist, only panel descriptions are less specific to give me room to move on art. I'll also over-write that initial riot draft. People I trust will read the script while I'm working layouts and between their opinions and my own I'll shave off a chunk. Then I hit the pencils. For me pencils and inks are the most fun but also the place things are liable to change the most. I work entirely traditionally with Bristol board, black ink and an army of ragged brushes (I don't even print blue-line). There is no rhyme or reason at all. Whatever works. I like to improvise in the inking stage to find interesting textures.

Tell us a little about *Beast Wagon.*
Beast Wagon is a speculative fiction comedy/horror five-issue mini-series about revolutionary zoo animals. I like to describe it as apocalyptic kitchen sink drama.

How does your approach change working with a team?
They're very different. There's an intimacy and honesty to working solo. It really is your guts on the dance-floor stuff. But I adore collaborating with others and creating something greater than you could accomplish on your own. It's more a tango; an alchemy of styles and influences.

What attracted you to that genre?
It all came out of the characters and what they were going through, as well as our experiences visiting the zoo on a research trip. Anyone who has read my stuff knows I try and make comics you can read if you've never read comics. They're tethered to the history of the medium, the disposable trash artform, while trying to chew that up and spit it out as something contemporary. *Raygun Roads* was about 70s head-comics through the lens of austerity Britain. *Beast Wagon* was the R-rated Ken Russell HBO TV show your parents stopped you watching.

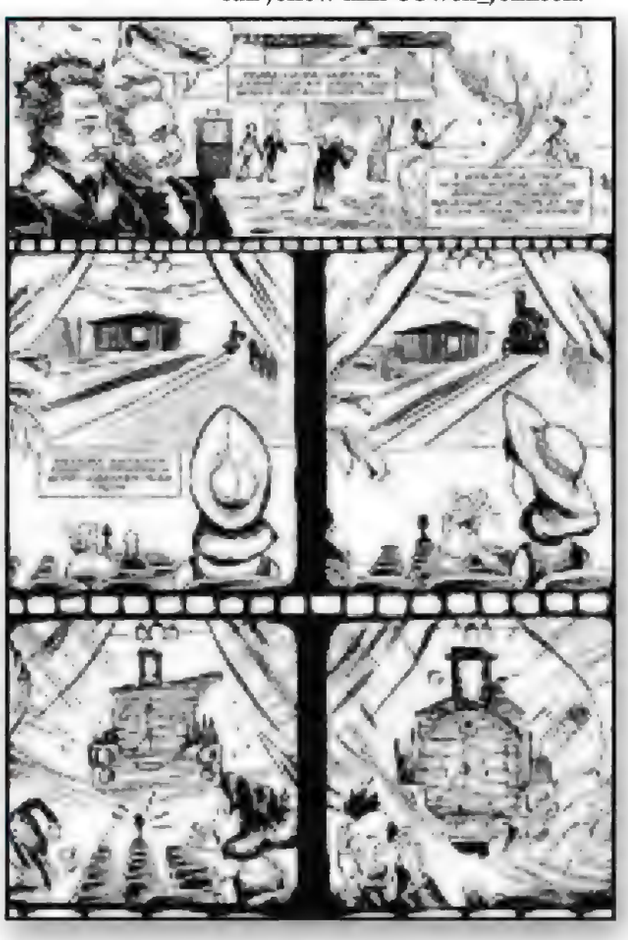
You've used crowdfunding, what's your experience with it?
They are both very different. Kickstarter is all about the sprint, and targeting at a core comics audience, all around the world. Unbound is more of a marathon, and looking outside the regular comics readership into the book trade. The production values of the subscriber copies are going to be nuts. Really beautiful objects. If we're successful in funding, Unbound distributes the book in bookstores, which is pretty exciting and something Kickstarter doesn't offer. Both have stretched my skills in very different areas. I love that! I remain convinced crowdfunding, when done right and creators deliver on a workable model, is the future of publishing.

Is there a single piece of advice for stepping to crowdfunding?
Build an audience first. Honour the community you're a part of (you're nothing without them). Think in inventive ways about incentives and consider ways retailers can support you. Do as much work beforehand as possible, and prepare yourself to work your arse off on an emotional rollercoaster.

Above: Johnson stands by crowdfunding as the best way to publish his comics

What's next for you?
I've got my hands full ensuring *Reel Love* gets funded. I'm talking to cinemas about doing bespoke posters, Q&As, screenings and such. Collaborating with universities and arts organisations about creating graphic novels, crowdfunding, and turning your passion into a profession (I've been on both sides of the table – marketing, as well as creating books – which is pretty unique). Trying to widen the reach of the medium I love so much.

Reel Love *is funding now at unbound.com/books/reel-love. You can follow him @Owen_Johnson.*



ADAM P KNAVE, DJ KIRKBRIDE AND NICHOLAS BROKENSHIRE

From tackling legends to creating their own magic, **Alasdair Stuart** talks to the Amelia Cole creators about their current projects

When Amelia Cole hit the comic scene in 2013, we were thrust into her dual worlds, drawn to perfection. Now the team are back with Amelia's next outing and we caught up with them to find out more.

Tell us a little about *Amelia Cole*.

APK: *Amelia Cole* takes place over three worlds that are both similar to each other and vastly different. The root of the differences comes down to magic, or the lack thereof. One world is like our own, only science, no magic. Another is magic only. And the third is a blending of the two – which introduces new sets of socio-economic problems. Amelia can travel between the worlds and this creates all sorts of issues. She just wants to do good, even if other people think she shouldn't get involved in certain situations.

NB: At the start of the story, she's fun loving and generally quite gung-ho. She likes to help people with her magic and seems to have quite a good time doing it.

DJK: Amelia is the kind of person I wish I was. She heads *toward* trouble instead of running away from it. She's all about helping, and luckily, she's a very powerful mage.

How did you differentiate between the three worlds artistically?

NB: It was really tricky because it wasn't just a case of creating very different realities. The 'Unknown World' where magic and science exist together and the non-magic world were very similar in their general appearance although the Unknown world's technology is a bit behind the regular world. Thus, you'll see older cars, no mobile phones, no Internet or satellite dishes in the Unknown world. Also the Unknown world has a bit of a mish-mash of dress styles. That was put in to hopefully convey the weirder aspect to this semi-magical world. It was easier when I got to portray the 'magic only' world because it was more whimsical and weird. It was all weird bulbous, floating buildings and so forth.

DJK: At one point I think I was pushing for a kind of different colour scheme or wash or something for each world, but that was too obvious. We did take pains to make sure the Blended (née Unknown) World wasn't quite as technologically advanced as ours and not as fantastical as the Magic World. It was tricky and kind of subtle for a comic.

It got kinda crazy when we started going back and forth and back again between all three worlds in book four, but we never got any complaints from confused readers, so Nick clearly pulled the whole thing off with aplomb.

Above: The *Amelia Cole Omnibus* is out on 14 June. The first collection of *Once And Future Queen* will be available in November

What did you do to make Amelia stand out so much?

NB: I think that Amelia's nature is perhaps the most attractive aspect of the story. She's unrelentingly a good person and genuinely wants to help, as opposed to say, Buffy Summers (*Buffy The Vampire Slayer*) who had the responsibility forced upon her as a teenager. She's not a bubble headed do-gooder though, she's still smart and sassy, just a very good person. I think a lot of people have latched onto that. Also – the Avengers have a Hulk, Amelia has a Lemmy.

DJK: Ah, that's a good one, Nick. Now I want to see Lemmy and Hulk arm wrestle.

How'd Lemmy, King of Golems come about?

NB: When Adam and DJ first proposed that we give Amelia a sidekick, they described him as a

IMAGES COURTESY OF MONKEYBRAIN COMICS

Techno-Golem. Something that embodied the combination of magic and technology. Pretty genius stuff on their part, I'd say. The *Unknown World* trade paperback has a bunch of the original designs for Lemmy in the extras. He went through many incarnations. I seem to recall wanting to call him 'Landfill'. Even as the story progressed and my art changed (as it does all the way through!), so did Lemmy's appearance. I put it down to this: as time passed Lemmy's personality became stronger and more defined and the magic holding him together responded by making him more and more human-like. By the end of the story Lemmy's proportions, although still large and somewhat recombinable, are quite human as opposed to when we first met him.

DJK: We were all excited for Lemmy, especially after seeing all the designs. I think the name was an offhanded suggestion from Nick. He was the strong, silent type, but we wanted him to be likeable. Some of his background looking at cute animals or pretty flowers were in the script, and some were from the brilliant hand of Nick. While he's not totally human and incapable of speech, the more we went along, the more we saw he had a mind of his own. And when we got to the secret, we only know because of flashbacks, not because Amelia monologued it to anyone, the origin of his name, well, c'mon. He's a *best friend* through and through. Lemmy's the greatest.

Above: The three of them are currently working on Amelia Cole

What worked best for you going along the digital path?

DJK: Thanks to being digitally published by MonkeyBrain through comiXology, we got to do all 30 issues and tell the complete story as we originally envisioned it. If it'd been in print single issues, I don't think that would've happened, due to the costs and overcrowding of the comic market, particularly all those crossovers and comics starring 80-year-old characters most people know from movies. While going digital first possibly gave us a smaller readership overall, it also allowed us to last longer, so pluses and minuses.

APK: Digital also let us do shorter single issues. That let us focus and make dense, action packed moments and not be beholden to exactly 22 pages each month. We could do 12. Or 14, or even 28.

NB: For me, having the flexibility of the digital schedule was very handy, especially as for most of the time I was drawing *Amelia* I was still working the day job. Also, I personally wasn't ready to be rolled out in print. I was still learning how to do this thing! (Still am!)

You told a finite story in an industry where that's the exception rather than the rule. What led to that decision?

APK: A great story needs a great ending. Since this is creator-owned we got to decide to end it where we wanted, and how. It's important for stories to end.

What are you all working on now?

APK: We have the *Once And Future Queen* trade out this November, so go pre-order that. Otherwise, personally, I have a bunch of novels on deadline and a handful of pitches winding their way through systems.

NB: I'm finishing the art on *The Once And Future Queen* and then embarking on a horror series set in the North of England with a writer called Ellis Bojar.

DJK: I'm about to work on some breakfast. Maybe pancakes.

JOE GLASS

Creator of The Pride, an LGBTQ+ superhero ensemble, talks to **Claire Lim** about diversity in comics

Comic books have always offer an escape for people, but Joe Glass noticed something it wasn't offering us: equality in representation. He tells us why it is so important for audiences to read LGBTQ+ fiction and more…

How did you start getting into creating comics?

I just kind of always wanted to do it, you know. This question comes up a lot, often at comic cons, and the thing is, there's no special gate you need to get through or permission you need to receive. I just wanted to do it, so I started doing it. I will admit I started off by wanting to be a comics artist when I was a teenager, but I learned that, yeah, I'm not really a very good sequential artist. So, I stuck with what I was better at – telling stories – and it went from there.

> There are so many queer characters in comics who are so deeply hidden

Growing up, were there any LGBTQ+ characters you admired?

I mean, here's the thing: technically speaking there were, but I wasn't aware of them. They were incredibly few, there were characters like Northstar, but they were almost hidden away; they'd appear for an issue or two and then vanish again. They would always be hard to identify as queer characters unless you knew their full previous history. So technically, yes, but they made it an incredibly difficult treasure hunt to find them.

When and why did you decide to write *The Pride*?

I started coming up with the characters way back in those teenage wannabe comic artist days and I worked on a few scenes here and there. But for the longest time, I kind of felt no one else would want to read my story, that this was just the comic that I wanted to see published. One day, after university and years of procrastinating and putting it off, my colleagues on another writing project, *Stiffs*, gave what I had a read and said I should go for it – maybe that was all the confidence boost that I needed because then I started working on *The Pride* in earnest.

How would you describe *The Pride*?

It's a superhero action adventure

Above: Glass opines that while LGBTQ+ characters have been present in comics, they aren't usually out and proud about it

featuring a team of all LGBTQ+ superheroes, fighting to improve diversity and representation in a world that so often is ready to shrug them off or hide them away. They face-off against a world that doesn't want them and supervillains with diabolical plots that *The Pride* may just be the only heroes in the world capable of stopping.

The comic isn't subtle in its representation of the LGBTQ+ community. How important is it in your opinion for LGBTQ+ characters to be 'out' on the page?

There are so many queer characters in comics who are so deeply hidden, or 'straight acting' that if it wasn't for the occasional on the nose plotline with them declaring 'for I am gay!' the reader just wouldn't know and as a gay man myself, I am deeply invested and in love with the queer community and our history and culture, so I wanted to

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lean into it, rather than away from it. I wanted to create characters who are visible and there for the audience craving them.

Are any of the characters based around yourself or your own experiences?

I mean, all of them to some extent; they're all a little mix of people I've known, or even myself. There's even some situations that were kind of based on life experiences too, but I wouldn't say any one character is just any one person I know... more like amalgamations.

What's the most common thing people reading the comic for the first time often say to you?

I mean, not to sound big headed, but often "thank you". The desire for actual full, honest and open LGBTQ+ representation runs deep among the comic's fans and not just the queer readers. Loads of *The Pride*'s fans are actually straight and they get just as excited at the prospect of a greater diversity in comics, too.

Readers who come back will often come back telling me about a character they especially loved or related to, a joke they liked, or how it made them think about a different perspective. Sometimes, they'll tell me about their own journey and when you can hear that and they say thank you for this little comic book you did, that you just wanted to have be there for those who need or want it? Yeah, that really means a lot.

Above: Pride showcases Fab Man and his anger at being misrepresented

What do you hope people (of all sort of backgrounds) take from *The Pride*?

I hope it makes them think of perspectives other than their own, but also feel like they can finally feel represented in a medium they love. I hope it makes some people consider how diversity is important, and how things so often put down as 'LGBTQ+ issues' are just human issues, that we can all understand from our point of view.

Do you think bigger publishers are doing enough to promote diversity?

Oh, not by a longshot. They're making efforts, and that is awesome, so not saying there is no effort to improve, but there are still some major stumbling blocks. It is often mainly in the creative talent pool, which is deeply homogenised, and the big companies like to think that when they get the pat-on-the-back news of this one diverse hire they made it solves it. However, they always seem to treat diversity as one group at a time – it will be improving the breadth of the diversity of the voices they hire to create their stories that will really help the issue.

And the independent ones, too?

Again, I think there's work to be done but maybe less so in independent comics. They already have such a wide-range of voices – but it can always improve.

And when it comes to superheroes on screen, do you think there's still work to be done here?

Here is where real, effective and, frankly, immediate change needs be enacted. The fact that the Marvel Cinematic Universe has been going for nine years now with over a dozen film instalments and there are still no LGBTQ+ superheroes in any of them is horrendous. Now DC has entered the fray, with superhero films coming from every direction, and yet the numbers of LGBTQ+ representation in them is still utterly abysmal. It is something that needs to be immediately addressed.

What's next for *The Pride*?

Well, I'm currently working on the second volume of stories with a new artist, so hopefully there will be some news on that front very soon. You have not seen the last of *The Pride*!

WOMEN IN COMICS

Kelly Kanayama tracks the rise of Wonder Woman, the problems with 'strong' female characters and the struggles of women creators behind the scenes

At last, Wonder Woman has her own blockbuster film, and it only took seven and a half decades!

You read that right. It's been over 75 years since the 1941 debut of everyone's favourite Amazon in *All-Star Comics* #8. Since then, Wonder Woman has starred in her own long-running comic, been the centre of a beloved TV show, had her face printed on everything from kids' pyjamas to an exclusive limited makeup range at MAC, been appointed as an honourary UN Ambassador, and become perhaps the best-known female superhero in Western pop culture. Yet 2017 is her first big-screen outing as a solo superhero; compare that to Batman, who's been headlining films since 1943, or Superman, whose cinema career spans a period of almost 70 years. So why wasn't Wonder Woman considered film-worthy until now?

The answer to this question lies in a problem that's plagued superhero comics for quite some time: women in comics almost never get the respect they deserve, whether on the page or behind the scenes. And while gender representation [illegible] distinctly better than it used to be, we still have a long way to go.

Wonder Woman is, in fact, an excellent example of how these issues play out. Her genesis is credited to author William Moulton Marston and artist HG Peter, who introduced the character in *All-Star Comics* #8 (1941). The concept for Wonder Woman was rooted in Marston's belief that women were superior to men due to being more naturally inclined toward "loving submission", and that a female superhero would enforce justice by encouraging others to follow similar ideology. To push this concept further, the character was situated in an all-women society of Amazons on the utopia named Paradise Island.

Marston and Peter could therefore present their new character as a feminine alternative to the aggressive male heroes of competing comics; by the time *All-Star Comics* #8 rolled around, Batman had already racked up several kills in his own strips, which included pushing a criminal into a vat of acid and hanging a man from the Batplane. In contrast, Wonder Woman often conquered her enemies not by punching them in the face, but by teaching them about the power of submission and love. It helped that Peter drew her as a sort of patriotic neo-Hellenic glamour girl with perfect curls and mascara-heavy eyelashes, because peace is easier to stomach when preached by someone conventionally attractive.

Nevertheless, Wonder Woman managed to defeat a whole slew of enemies ranging from Nazi masterminds to misogynistic scientists to members of the Greco-Roman pantheons, via powers that came from a 100 per cent female society. She also joined the Justice Society of America, because why not. Not too shabby for a woman in comics during the 1940s.

Unfortunately, she had many more gender equality battles left to fight. For one thing, since she was the only woman in the Justice Society, she ended up working as their secretary. Then there

Left: Power Girl is a prime example of how women's superhero outfits aren't practical and focus on ample bosoms

Above: Witchblade barely coves the nipples with her skimpy non-outfit

Below: Madelyne Pryor gets a loin cloth and thigh-highs but very little else...

"SO WHY WASN'T WONDER WOMAN CONSIDERED FILM-WORTHY UNTIL NOW?"

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Above Originally, all a man had to do to subdue Wonder Woman was chain her wrists together.

Top Wonder Woman's first appearance in All-Star Comics #8.

Right For a long time, Wonder Woman was the only female in the JLA.

was her secret weakness, namely that her Amazonian powers disappeared whenever a male opponent chained her bracelets together. Did we mention yet that Marston was a bondage enthusiast? The idea that all it takes to stop a powerful goddess is a man and a strategically attached chain doesn't jibe well with the claim that Wonder Woman was meant to promote female supremacy.

During Marston and Peter's time on the comic, readers were also treated to numerous scenes of Wonder Woman chained up or binding other women. While many of these scenes were presented as playful, they still raised questions about Marston's motives. Maybe he was trying to shed light on themes of consensual kink so that it could be seen as healthy, or maybe he wanted to see dozens of women in sexualised situations.

That there's the mess of who actually created *Wonder Woman* in the first place. Although it's fairly undisputed that Marston did the scripting and Peter did the art, several sources – including a 1972 article in the *New York Times* – state that Marston's wife, Elizabeth Holloway Marston, was the one who told her husband that his new superhero should be female. In other words, the Wonder world's most famous superheroine owes her gender to a woman who was never officially credited in any comics, cartoons, or merchandise, or even by Marston himself. It seems that female supremacy was easier to write as fantasy than it was to put into practice.

Despite these troubled times, *Wonder Woman*'s

Above: Sue Storm, or Invisible Woman, originally had the same masculine costume as her male team mates

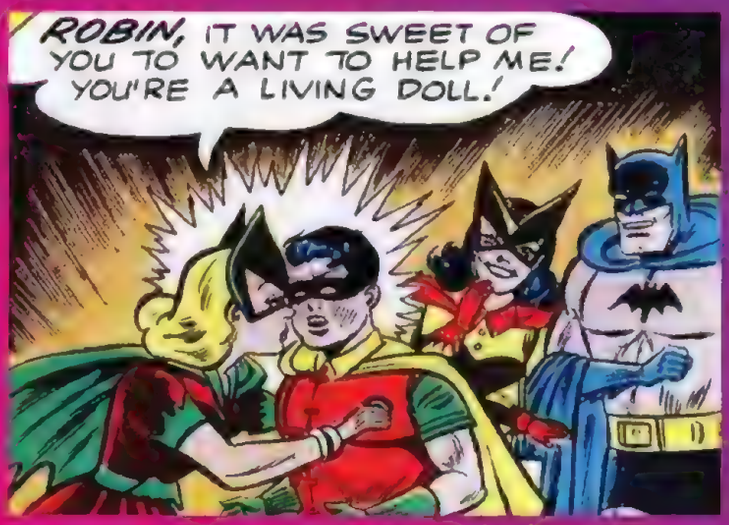
Right: When Batgirl was introduced she was Robin's love interest Betty Kane before being reinvented as Barbara Gordon

popularity paved the way for numerous female heroes and villains in subsequent years. These women were not content to sit back and take meeting minutes for the Flash; they were on the front lines battling evil, fuelled by a new independence that stemmed from the burgeoning feminist movement. In *The Fantastic Four*, Sue Storm, also known as the Invisible Girl (later the Invisible Woman), wore the same blue jumpsuit as her male teammates and fought monsters with them. Jean Grey, who started out as the superhero Marvel Girl, deployed her telekinetic powers alongside her fellow X-Men to help protect the innocent. Comics also acquired new female variations on existing male heroes. For instance, *Batman* books had Batgirl, who was first introduced as Robin's love interest Betty Kane before getting rebooted as Barbara Gordon, Gotham City's head librarian and the daughter of the city's police commissioner.

On the other side of the law, there were characters like Catwoman, an elite thief who carried a whip and tended towards wearing thigh-high slit skirts, or, in more modern iterations, tight black leather. There was Poison Ivy, a femme fatale with a plant theme whose kisses were literally toxic. Women began appearing across superhero comics as villainous assassins, martial artists, telepaths and magic adepts who could snap spines without blinking or could manipulate the fabric of reality itself.

It should be noted here that while these women varied greatly in terms of their powers, costumes and so on, a particular racial uniformity persisted – ie most of them were white. The few superwomen of colour who graced comic book pages included characters like ex-detective Misty Knight, a black woman who sported a bionic arm and a gorgeous Afro, and Mantis, a martial artist/former prostitute/"Celestial Madonna" from Vietnam. If you catch a whiff of stereotyping in the air, you're not alone.

At any rate, no amount of superheroism or supervillainy on the page could stop these women's greatest foe: the need for portrayals of female power to avoid threatening male-dominated social structures. One way of negotiating this was to objectify comic book women as much as possible. Sure, they could kill you with their mind or lift trucks over their head one-handed, but what really mattered was T&A. Costumes became a competition to show off the most skin without getting arrested for indecent exposure. Take Poison Ivy, who started out in a leafy leotard and progressed to being practically naked; Star Sapphire from *Green Lantern*, whose costume left almost the entire front of her torso exposed; or Harley Quinn, who used to wear a commedia dell'arte-style harlequin outfit but in the end had to get her assets out for the lads like the rest of her colleagues.



Top: Even after Gail Simone courageously exposed the misogynistic double standards at work in the comics industry, the problem persisted. Here, Deadshot and Harley Quinn are depicted in a sexually suggestive manner.

Above middle: Other female characters are portrayed in equally uncomfortable positions.

Above: She-Hulk is a rare exception, as women being sexually objectified in art is overwhelmingly the norm.

Above right: Catwoman is often guilty of objectifying a lack of spine in her female and male friends alike.

These poor women were also frequently drawn in poses ranging from unnatural to anatomically impossible that further portrayed them as sex objects. Granted, perhaps some superpowers cause women to develop 360-degree spines! Breadth-wise, their breasts and hearts can be on maximum patriotic display at all times.

It has to be that. Otherwise it's just ridiculous and sexist.

To be fair, the problem didn't wholly lie with poses and costumes. Sometimes the body being contorted into yet another "sexy" pose or squeezed into an outfit smaller than a prison stamp had proportions so exaggerated that any attempt at realistic stature and costuming would have been futile. The 1990s was especially bad for this, 44DDH chests and waists so tiny they left no room for internal organs were standard female physiques. Such

aesthetics sent the message that women in comics didn't need to look like individual humans. Better they should look like dolls, subject to their owners' whims.

Preposterous clothing and figures were just the tip of the problematic iceberg, however. There was a deeper issue at work concerning the fear of women's agency over their own bodies. After all, what exemplifies female bodily autonomy more than a woman with superhuman abilities? Clearly these formidable women had to be kept in their place somehow, and it turned out the easiest way to do that was to depict female power and sexuality as evil.

Thus superheroines who turned to the dark side got more revealing outfits to illustrate their lack of morals. Madelyne Pryor, a clone of Jean Grey who was married to Cyclops, became the mind-manipulating Goblin Queen, she ditched her comfy shirts and sensible jeans for what can only be described as an underboob top and a loincloth, plus black thigh high boots.

Likewise, when Sue Storm briefly became the villain Malice, Mistress of Hate, she ditched the bright full-body jumpsuit for a skimpy black number that was basically a bikini with a long cloth drape at the bottom, a black hood covered in spikes, and a spiked collar. And thigh boots, naturally. The whole ensemble was very S&M chic.

Significantly, as the Goblin Queen and Malice, Madelyne and Sue didn't just acquire new stylists – they also grew more powerful. Before turning to evil, Madelyne had no powers except for a short stint as a healer, thanks to Loki granting average folks a taste of superhumanity through magic. As the Goblin Queen, she could control minds and transform people into demons. Although Sue could already turn invisible and generate force fields, as Malice she learned to use these powers aggressively, creating unseen weapons from her force fields to carve up her enemies. Wanting to gain power is evil if you're a woman, dear readers. That's why Madelyne and Sue had to wear dominatrix gear; it's the same reason why Catwoman carries a whip and wears black leather. Only bad women want to be in control, whether sexually, mentally, or in any other way.

And if we're talking about the evils of female power in comics, we can't forget the *Dark Phoenix Saga*, where Jean Grey developed cosmic-level powers and murdered a planet as a result. It all kicked off when Jean bonded with the Phoenix, a manifestation of the universe's prime life force, which gave her

> THE WHOLE ENSEMBLE WAS VERY S&M CHIC

SO DON'T JUST STAND THERE LOOKIN' PRETTY, CAJUN
FEAR, MY FRIEND
YOUR ADMONITION IS A WASTE OF BREATH
AWFULLY CONSIDERATE OF CYCLOPS, DON'T YOU THINK
TO FACE US WITH OPPOSITION THAT EVEN ANY PHYSICAL STRENGTH IS CAPABLE OF DISABLING

Above: For a brief time Sue Storm became Malice, Mistress of Hate and her outfit was very S&M

Left: Female characters have continued to have perpetual 'broken back' syndrome

Below: The Hawkeye Initiative was created to show the injustice in presentation, here a clear example of men vs women

abilities beyond her wildest dreams. To test this newfound power, she journeyed across several galaxies but had to stop and recharge in order to keep going, so she consumed the energy of a nearby star. Unfortunately, this killed the civilisation of the planet orbiting said star, and Jean was convicted of genocide and summarily executed. By the way, since no cautionary tale about ambitious women is complete without psychosexual strangeness, it must be noted that *Dark Phoenix Saga* author Chris Claremont, as quoted in Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, described Jean's stellar energy consumption as "the quest for the cosmic orgasm". [illegible] pursuing sexual pleasure, and expressing your own desire [illegible]

A more nuanced expression of these fears regarding women's agency can be seen in Poison Ivy, who evolved from being an eco-terrorist with lethal lipstick into a modern nature goddess whose

> **"ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK?"**

Ivy is a genius at using her sexuality to get what she wants, but she's also a powerful botanist with an encyclopedic knowledge of plants and their properties. Her ability to control plant life is a direct result of her unique biology, which has made her immune to most poisons and toxins. Ivy's power is at its most formidable when she's surrounded by lots of green stuff, causing skyscrapers to buckle, throwing cars through the air, shattering the infrastructure of Gotham City.

Such images of the supernatural feminine belong to a well-established visual lexicon, which is sometimes linked to masculinity's fear of all those jokes about building an phallic symbol), reflects a view of unchecked female power as a destructive force that would end society as we know it. Add to that Ivy's intelligence, demonstrated by her past as a research scientist with a PhD in botanical biochemistry, and she becomes downright terrifying to someone who perceives female power as needing to be suppressed. In the words of Amy Chu, who wrote the character's first and to date only solo comic, *Poison Ivy: Cycle Of Life And Death* (2010), "She's a powerful and smart character that's been around for so long, yet so little has been done with her. Too many writers and artists just want to make her a sexy plant thing, but that's been historically true for many female characters in comics." The Ivy problem, Chu suggests, is symptomatic of how women as a whole are treated in superhero comics. "I think a lot of female characters, not just Ivy, have been put in the wrong written (who have all unintentionally been male...)"

It's true. Throughout history, the vast majority of comics creators working on female characters, and on superheroes in general, have been men. While women like artist Marie Severin and

"16.3% OF DC CREATORS ARE WOMEN"

writer/editor Louise Simonson contributed greatly to raising standards in superhero comics, it has been the norm for female characters to be conceptualised, drawn and written by men. Even Wonder Woman, with only a small handful of female authors and artists (most of whom signed on in the past ten years) across her 75-plus-year publication history, is no exception. Suddenly the failings in how comics portray women are a bit more explicable.

However, in the past several years, comics have made an apparent effort to add women to their creative rosters and to improve their depictions. Thus we've been introduced to America Chavez, a young Latina woman from another dimension who prefers hoodies to high heels; the current Ms Marvel, a Pakistani-American teenage Muslim whose book kept topping the *New York Times* comics bestseller list; a Batgirl who fights doxxers, enjoys going to indie gigs and runs around in yellow Doc Martens; and many more women from a variety of backgrounds with rich inner lives and practical wardrobes. Onwards and upwards!

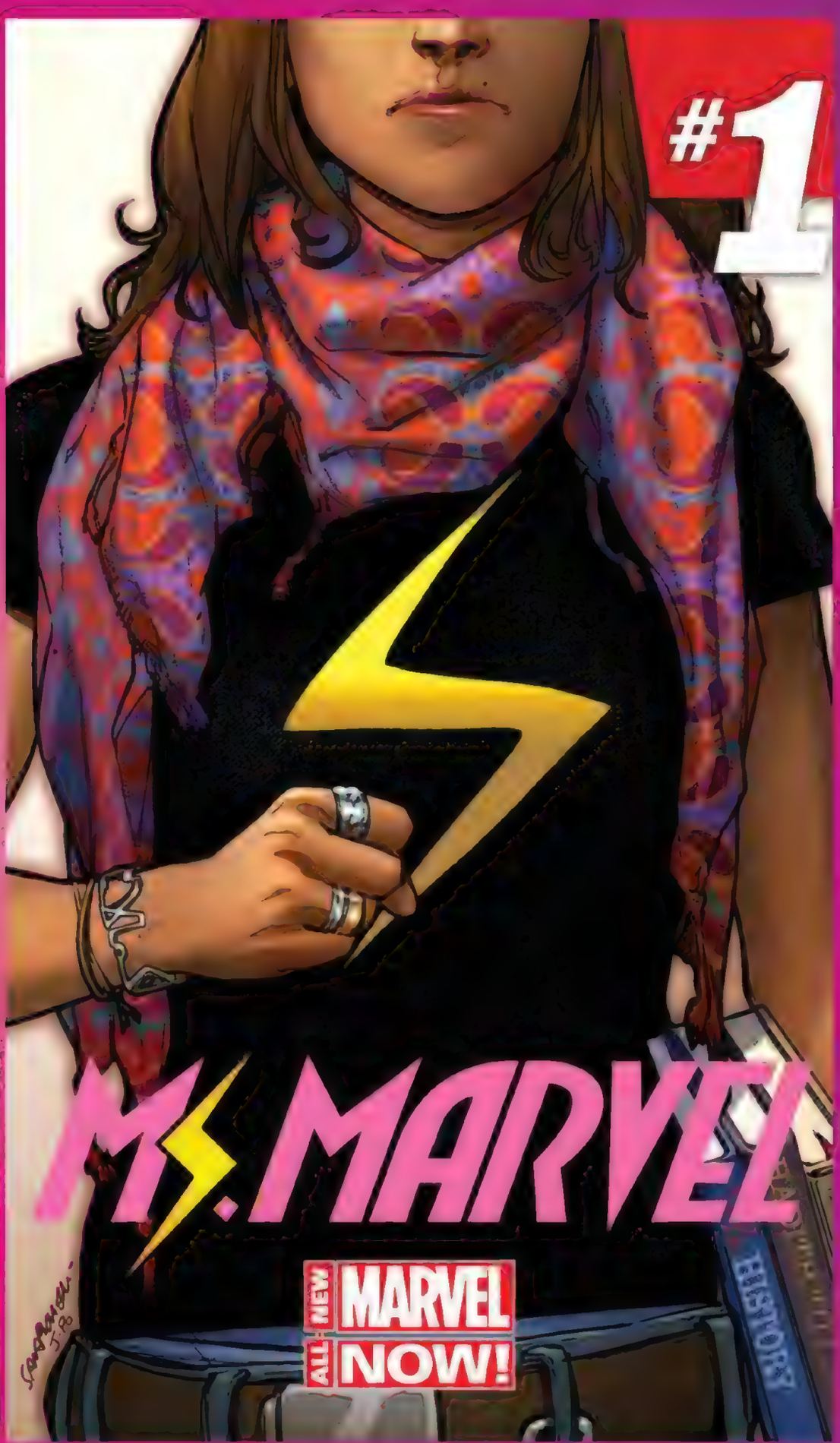
Or should that be one step forward, two steps back?

In 2013, DC held a "talent search" art contest asking readers to draw "Harley sitting naked in a bathtub with toasters, blow dryers, blenders, appliances all dangling above the bathtub and she has a cord that will release them all" (text taken from their official guidelines). The contest was withdrawn, but the anger surrounding it lingered.

In 2014, Marvel hired erotic artist Milo Manara to paint the cover for the debut issue of *Spider-Woman #1*. He gave them a highly sexualised picture of Spider-Woman lifting her backside into the air that looked more like a pornographic screencap than a story about fighting crime.

In 2016, DC fired Shelly Bond from her Editor-in-Chief position at its Vertigo imprint, a position she'd inherited from Vertigo's original EIC Karen Berger, in order to fold Vertigo into mainstream DC editorial control under Dan DiDio. Considering the imprint's reputation for producing groundbreaking content – *Preacher* was a Vertigo title, as were *Transmetropolitan* and *Scalped*, among many others – and considering that Vertigo had always been run by a woman, Bond's firing was painfully significant.

A February 2017 article at Bleeding Cool by comics historian Tim Hanley revealed that DC and Marvel's creative rosters are still predominantly male. Only 16.3 per cent of DC creators are women, at Marvel where 17.1 per cent of creators are women, the gender ratio is almost as poor. As Desiree Rodriguez, Editorial Assistant for Lion Forge Comics' Catalyst Prime initiative, puts it, "The industry can be better at hiring outside of the strict standard we see and have seen for decades [...] there are improvements being made,



but we still have a long way to go".

If this seems hopeless, take heart. Developments such as the rising popularity of crowdfunding platforms and immediate creator-fan engagement have fostered an atmosphere where women's voices receive more representation. Thanks to these technologies, Rodriguez says, "so many talented women [are] getting to tell their stories and getting notice through those non-traditional channels". And since the editorial strictures of said channels are often equally non-traditional, women can also appear in stories where they don't have to conform to male-dominated norms.

Imagine that: an industry where superwomen are allowed to be, well, super. Where female power is celebrated rather than feared. Where women in comics, both on the page and behind the scenes, are no longer bound by any limitations but their own.

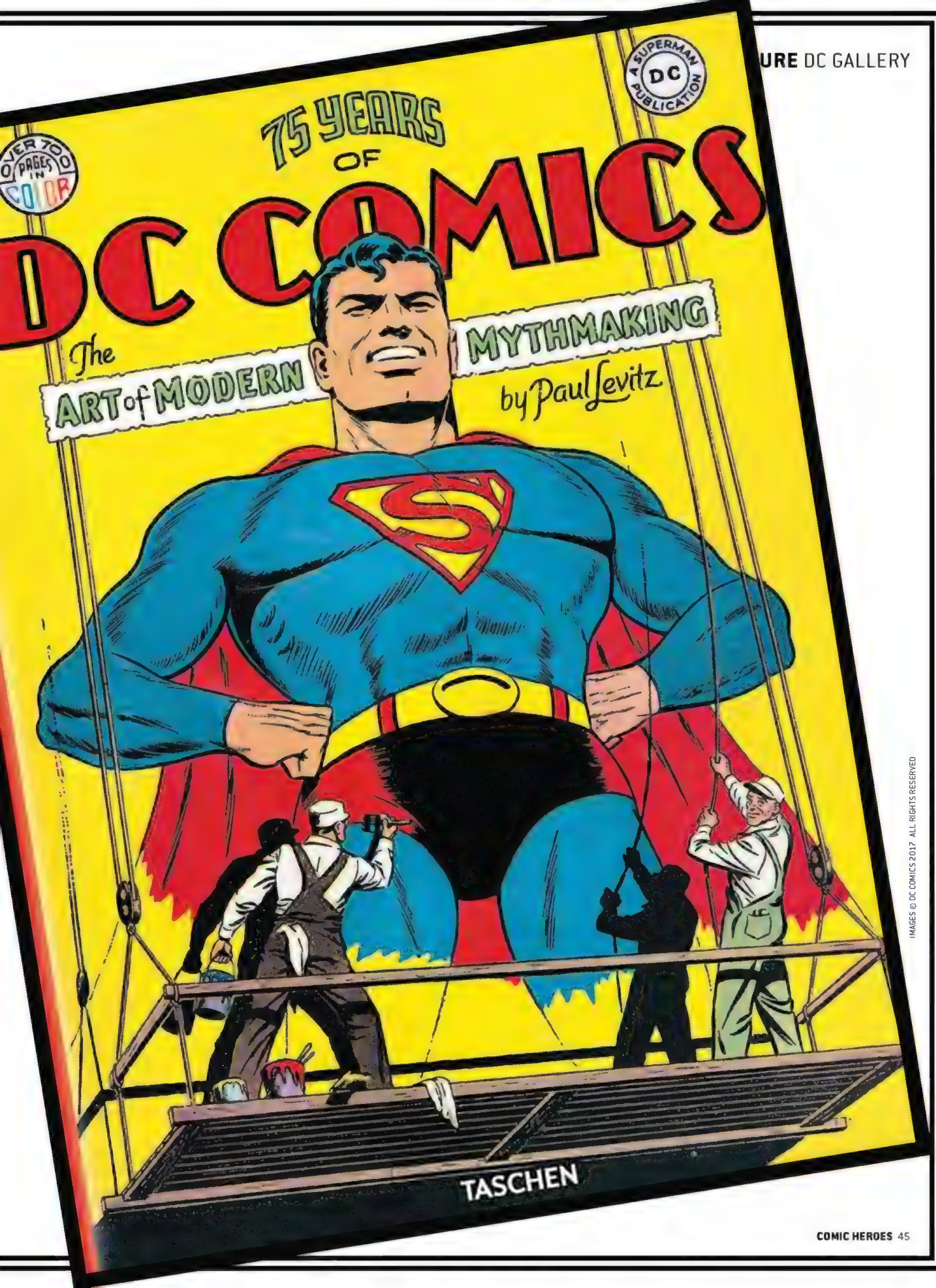
Above: Secret Wars sees a cover that doesn't pit women as villains in impossible bodily positions

Left: Ms Marvel finally sees some decent representation, not just of women, but of the Muslim faith, too

***75 Years Of DC Comics: The Art Of Modern Mythmaking* by Paul Levitz** features over 2,000 images from the various eras of comics. It is on sale now from £49.99 for the new edition, or £135 for the original

DC 75 YEARS OF DC COMICS THE ART OF MODERN MYTHMAKING

DC celebrate their first 75 years in this new edition with a closer look at the art from the comics



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The Flash
— FASTEST MAN ALIVE!
BY GARDNER FOX AND E·E·HIBBARD
POLICE
"CHAPTER FOUR"
OVER THE ENTIRE NATION A NETWORK OF RADIO POLICE STATIONS ODERATE CONSTANTLY IN AN EFFORT TO LOCATE THE THREAT! POLICE CARS SHRILL THEIR SCREAMING SIRENS AS THEY DART FROM UNDER-

Interior art from **All-Flash Comics #2** by EE Hibbard. Each issue had multiple stories, all written by Gardner Fox

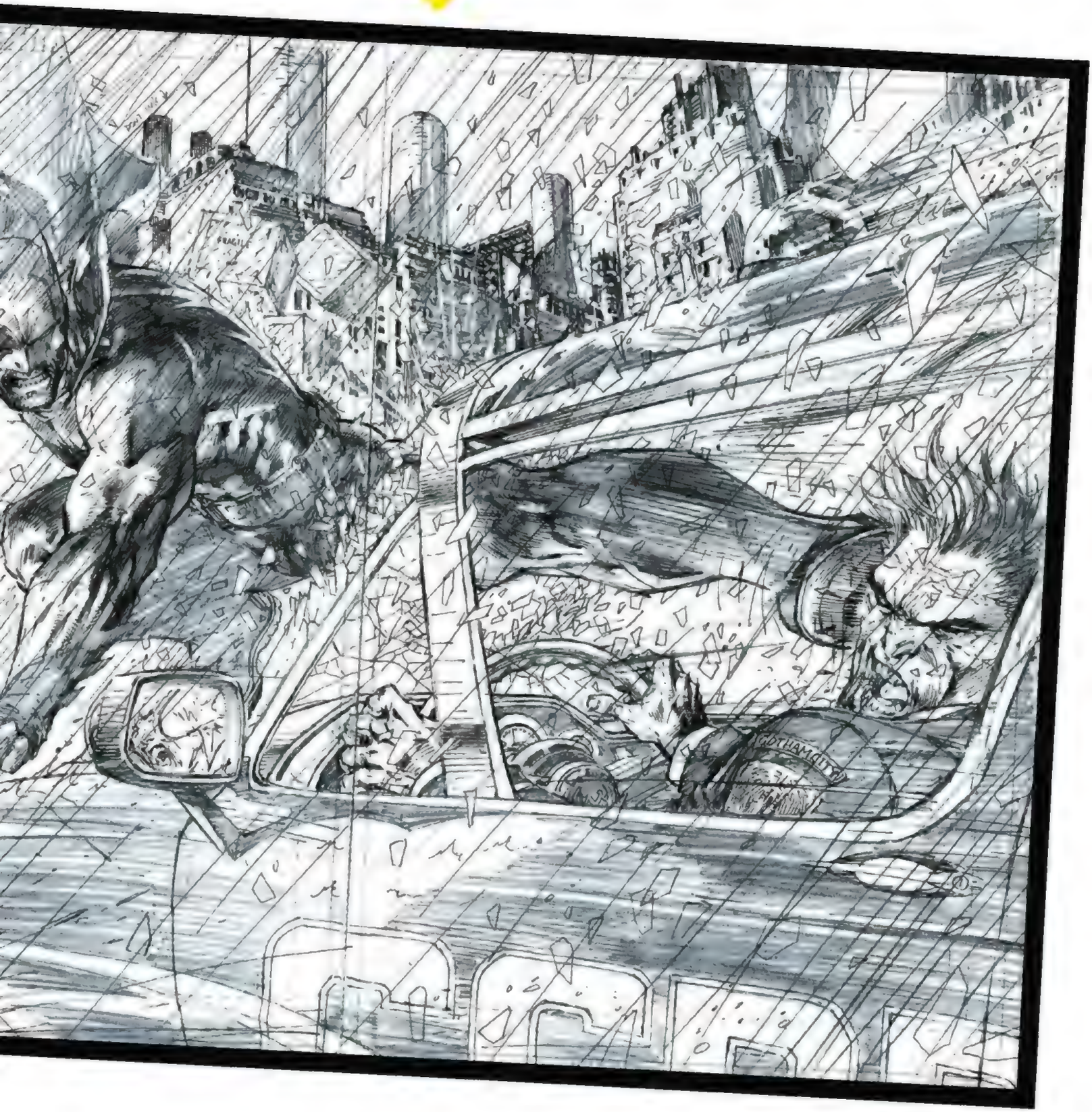
***World's Finest Comics* issue 63** by Win Mortimer. An anthology of DC's most popular characters, the book always featured Superman and Batman

***Strange Adventures* issue 25** was written by Gardner Fox, who would go on to introduce the concept of the multiverse to DC comics

HG Peter's cover for ***Wonder Woman* issue 21.** He was the artist on the book from its very first issue in 1941 until his death in 1958

After the 1960s TV series came to an end, the comics went for a harsher look, as seen on the cover of ***Batman*** **issue 205.**

While *All Star Batman & Robin, The Boy Wonder's* writing may have divided fans, everyone could agree that **Jim Lee's art** was the highlight of the series



DREAM COUNTRY

From *Preacher* to *Lucifer*, TV is plundering the back pages of **VERTIGO**. Abigail Chandler explores the history of DC Comics' edgy, provocative imprint

When DC Comics launched their Vertigo imprint in 1993, they wanted a place where they could develop some of their lesser-known characters and give creators a chance to tell controversial and groundbreaking new stories. Comics like *Sandman* and *Hellblazer* were doing well for them and they wanted to give them a home of their own.

Fast-forward 23 years and Vertigo screen adaptations are everywhere you look. Whether they bombed, like *Constantine*, progressed nicely like *Lucifer* and *iZombie* or were the hottest new show of the summer (hello, *Preacher*), the TV industry finally seemed to cotton on to what the comics industry figured out over two decades ago – controversial, provocative material is always the most interesting.

1990s Vertigo marked a creative period that remains incredibly impressive to this day. We got *Sandman*, *Swamp Thing*, *Preacher*, *Hellblazer*, *Transmetropolitan*, *100 Bullets*, *The Invisibles* and more that decade, with titles like *Lucifer*, *Fables* and *Y: The Last Man* following in the early '00s.

Aside from poorly-received film adaptations of *V For Vendetta* and *Hellblazer* (as Keanu Reeves vehicle *Constantine*) and ongoing failed attempts to adapt *Sandman* for the big screen, the film and TV industry has been slow to take advantage of Vertigo's treasure trove of original stories. But with the success of *Preacher*, that's likely to change now.

THINK DIFFERENT

Right from the beginning, Vertigo was determined to do things differently. "I'm not a comic book fan," admits Vertigo founder and former executive editor Karen Berger. "I think I bring a different perspective to the work that I've done because I bring things from other areas of interest, objectivity, no sort of fan attachments, and ultimately just a

> They said 'Would you like to have your own imprint?' Well yeah…

desire to make cool, irreverent material in comic book form, and to really break the boundaries. That was the mission of Vertigo… to have a point of view that really went against the grain of what was out there at the time."

That different approach was what attracted writer Mike Carey to Vertigo, long before he wrote *Lucifer*, *Hellblazer* and *The Unwritten* for the imprint. "I think there was a point at which American comics – and I'm thinking right up to the late '70s and very early '80s – when American comics had gone into kind of a rut because they were being edited and written by people who had respect for the tradition, but they only knew one way to do it, they only knew one way to tell a story," Carey says. "And you suddenly get these British writers coming in, the first generation of Brits writing for the American market – and I'm thinking Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison – who basically just threw all the rules out the window and started doing something completely revolutionary."

So how exactly did a creator-owned line of violent, smart, epic and often explicit comics come out of the Comics Code-obeying DC of the early '90s? "I had been at DC for 10 years before Vertigo," Berger tells us. "I had already established the core books that became the seminal books of Vertigo, the proto Vertigo books like *Sandman*, *Hellblazer*, *Swamp Thing*, *Shade The Changing Man*, *Doom Patrol*… DC were calling them the Berger Books, they knew that there was something different and edgier going on in those titles and they had a great response. I was on maternity leave – it was in '91 when my first son was born – and I got a call from Jenette Kahn and Paul Levitz and Dick Giordano, who were running the company, and they said, 'We really would love for you to do more with this cool stuff that you're doing. We're getting such a good response, we see a larger audience for this', and they said, 'Would you like to have your own imprint?' I'm like, well yeah…" Berger laughs at the memory.

Berger was determined "not to be beholden to a lot of the things that were kind of the rules of superhero comics and try and really look outwards and look at the storytelling in perhaps more of a European way, in a more independent way, a more underground way." That was certainly something Carey responded to as a reader. "It was literally a different template for long-form storytelling that suddenly made all kinds of things possible," he remembers.

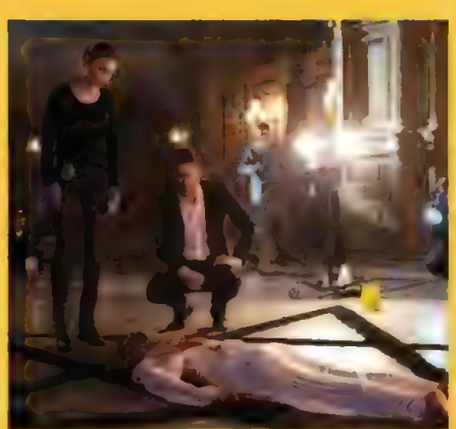
The remarkable thing about the Vertigo books is that something like

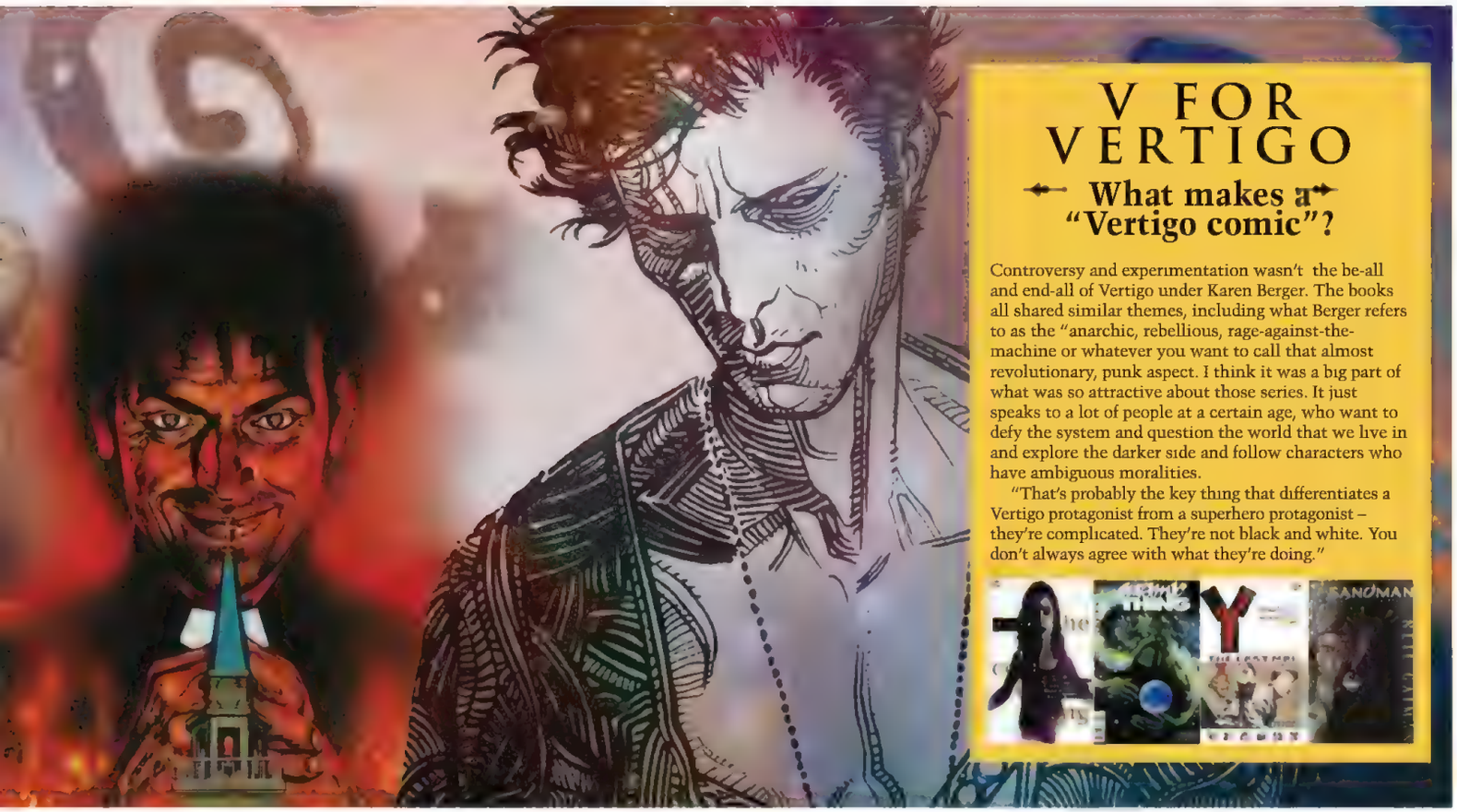
THE DEVIL'S WORK

The delicate art of adaptation

The *Lucifer* TV show has been criticised for having only the bare minimum in common with the comic book of the same name, but Mike Carey, writer of the *Lucifer* comic, knows better than most that adaptation means reinvention. He confesses that, while he's seen and enjoyed some episodes of *Lucifer*, he's "not following it religiously. No pun intended."

Carey, of course, was himself adapting *Lucifer* from Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, where the character had first been introduced. On the subject of adaptation, Carey says: "I've done it enough times to know now that you can't translate something straight from one medium to another, you have to figure out what works in the new medium and play to that… I don't resent the fact that the show's gone in a different direction from the comic. I think it had to. And ultimately I think that *Lucifer* the comic went in a somewhat different direction to *Sandman*, although it was always a joy to write a continuation of some of those stories. I still think that *Sandman* is one of the masterpieces of the whole comic book medium."





V FOR VERTIGO

What makes a "Vertigo comic"?

Controversy and experimentation wasn't the be-all and end-all of Vertigo under Karen Berger. The books all shared similar themes, including what Berger refers to as the "anarchic, rebellious, rage-against-the-machine or whatever you want to call that almost revolutionary, punk aspect. I think it was a big part of what was so attractive about those series. It just speaks to a lot of people at a certain age, who want to defy the system and question the world that we live in and explore the darker side and follow characters who have ambiguous moralities.

"That's probably the key thing that differentiates a Vertigo protagonist from a superhero protagonist – they're complicated. They're not black and white. You don't always agree with what they're doing."

Preacher feels just as shocking and revolutionary today as it did 20 years ago. "We were kind of ahead of the curve a little bit, I think," Berger says. "All stuff that goes against the grain tends to happen on the fringes of what's going on in the mainstream, and comics, just by its very nature, is a fringe medium, and what we were doing with Vertigo was even on the fringe of superheroes."

Carey thinks the reason comics can afford to be a little more experimental than TV is that they can literally afford it – financially speaking. "It costs hundreds of millions of dollars to make a tentpole movie, or to make a TV series, so the people who do those things, who bankroll those things are understandably averse to risk. There's very little risk in comics. You can do what you like really, the budgets are unlimited, the ceiling is very high."

Berger was never precious over the idea of what American comics should be, and that allowed Vertigo to really break free of convention. "You look at so much stuff that's on TV, and even in comics. I mean, when you do stuff that's licensed or company characters or franchises that go on so long, you just get really tired of it as a reader, as a viewer. And what we did at Vertigo was always ask, 'What's the next new thing out there and what can we do to really challenge what you expect of a comic book?'"

In 2010 DC Comics decided to move all of the Vertigo characters who originated in the DC universe back into the main DCU – including John Constantine, Swamp Thing and Shade, the Changing Man. Karen Berger left Vertigo in 2013, and DC has been making a concerted effort ever since to claw back some of the ground the imprint lost to other creator-owned publishers, especially Image Comics. These days it boasts a strong slate including *American Vampire, Unfollow* and *The Sheriff Of Babylon*.

ANARCHY IN THE DC

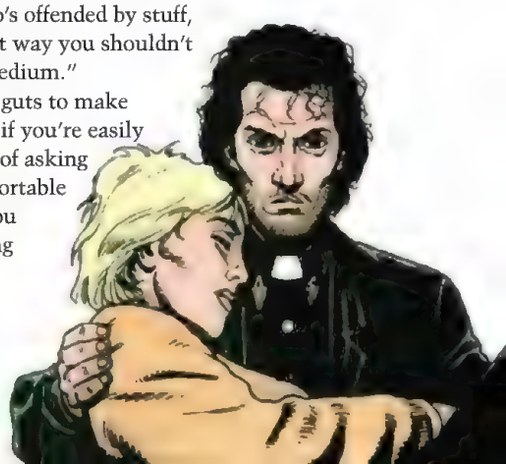
The anarchic days of Vertigo's immoral protagonists and rejection of authority might be over, but those themes are clearly still resonating with a modern audience, otherwise why would so many screen adaptations have come out at once?

"There's a certain type of person who always responds to not being complacent and being excited about something new, and challenging the status quo and challenging the system," Berger says. "A lot of it is questioning, not taking things as accepted. I think it's a really positive way to look at the world, to question it. I can definitely see the millennial attraction."

Despite the often controversial nature of the Vertigo titles, Berger was given almost complete free rein by DC. "I got a lot of support and that's what was so great about working at DC at the time – there was such a great trust and creativity and realising that there are risks you have to take if you want to run a creative company, and really give writers and artists the opportunity to push comics into a different zone."

While TV is catching up with Vertigo's boldness, it's still not quite there. The *Constantine* TV show was criticised by viewers for sanitising its occultist hero in order to make him palatable enough for network TV, and the *Preacher* TV show is yet to match the outrageously blasphemous realms of the comic book. "It's fiction," Berger stresses when *SFX* asks her about the religious controversy over *Preacher*. "I think that's the whole thing that people forget about. This is not real. And you're always going to find someone who's offended by stuff, but if you live that way you shouldn't be in a creative medium."

Vertigo had the guts to make that declaration – if you're easily offended or afraid of asking some big, uncomfortable questions, then you shouldn't be telling stories.



MARVEL TALES

Amazing Spider-Man author Dan Slott tells **Stephen Jewell** about the secrets of Spider-Man's success

Making his debut in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 in August 1962, there are a number of reasons why Spider-Man has become one of the most enduring superheroes of all time. It could be his constant wisecracking or his arachnid-inspired enhanced abilities, or his often oddball rogues gallery. But according to current *Amazing Spider-Man* scribe Dan Slott, it is Peter Parker's ordinary, everyman-esque status that makes the wall-crawler such a perennial fan-favourite, making him instantly a much more relatable than DC's more remote godlike pantheon of super-beings.

"Spider-Man is the hero who could be you," says Slott. "People think that being someone like Superman is unattainable, as he was born Superman, and he came to Earth on a rocket, so you could never be Superman. They then look at the flipside of that and go 'well, if I tried really hard every day, studied everything and had millions of dollars, I could maybe be Batman.' But the way the Marvel Universe works is you get a magic hammer like Thor, or you get bit by a radioactive spider like Spider-Man. It's more like 'what if something crazy happened to you? How would you be a superhero?' Spider-Man is a superhero in the way that you or I would be a superhero. He makes all the mistakes we would make."

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

While DC based its major protagonists in fictional locations like Gotham, Metropolis and Star City, Stan Lee was careful to ground series like *Fantastic Four* in the recognisable surrounds of the real life New York City. "All of New York and especially Manhattan makes up so much of the Marvel Universe," says Slott, who though hailing from California now calls Manhattan home himself. "We've recently been playing around for over a year of basically taking Spider-Man out of New York. Just to change things up and you can feel it whenever we have the character come back to New York, as the book just feels right. It's like he needs to be here, as he's your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man after all. It's his neighbourhood!"

Slott believes the webhead's distinctive mask has also helped him become ubiquitous. "Even though we can read the comics and see the movies to see what he looks like with the mask off, your first connection to the character is that wonderful costume and mask," he says of original artist Steve Ditko's memorable character design.

"He could be anyone under there, so there's something really nice about seeing an African-American or Latino kid playing with a Spider-Man action figure. Over here in the States, there's a wonderful advertisement for

Above: Peter Parker made his debut in *Amazing Fantasy* #15

Top Right: The webslinger met the 44th president of the US the week of his inauguration in January 1009

> "HE IS ONE THE MOST ENDURING SUPERHEROES OF ALL TIME"

YOU CAN HELP ME ESCORT MR. IVANKOV AND HIS FANCY-PANTS GANGSTERS FROM THE BUILDING!
THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY MRS. PARKER IF YOU DON'T WANT MY HELP, I CAN FIND MY OWN WAY OUT.
THIS GUY BOTHERING YOU, AUNT MAY?
HE WANTS TO USE F.E.A.S.T TO SHOW WHAT A HUMANITARIAN HE IS--
--GIVE OUT FREE PLASMA SCREENS TO THE POOR FOR CHRISTMAS AND TURKEYS AT THANKSGIVING--
MAYBE THEN PEOPLE WILL FORGET HOW HE BRINGS GIRLS ILLEGALLY TO THE COUNTRY TO SELL THEMSELVES--
HOW HE TERRORIZES THE RUSSIAN MERCHANTS WITH HIS PROTECTION RACKET--
BUT I WON'T LET THEM FORGET
NO LUCK SIR--
(TOUGH OLD LADY. REMINDS ME OF MY GRANDMOTHER.)
DURING THE SIEGE OF STALINGRAD, SHE LOADED AN ANTI-TANK GUN WITH HER BLINTZES AND HELD OFF FOUR PANZER DIVISIONS.
JOBS NO HELP HUH?
NO ONE CAN MUSTER UP THE COURAGE TO TALK TO THEM!
AND OUTSIDERS LIKE ME DON'T HAVE ANYTHING APPROACHING PROOF...
KEEP THE FAITH AUNT MAY.
PROOF IS A FUNNY THING.
IT HAS A TENDENCY TO TURN UP WHEN WE LEAST EXPECT IT.

Above: Aunt May was a regular feature of Peter Parker's everyday life

Top-right: Slott has worked across multiple Spidey titles during his career including *Clone Conspiracy*

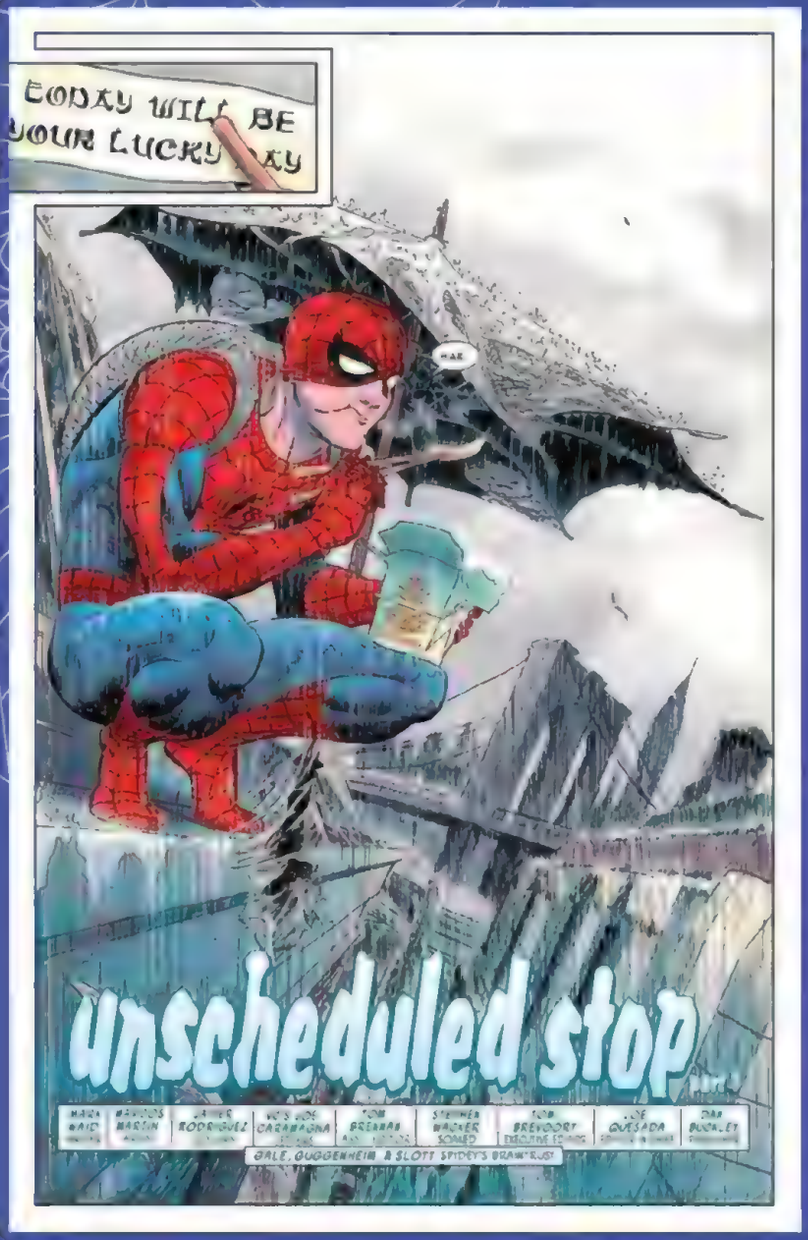
Campbell's Soup, where this kid is playing around in a Spider-Man costume and their mum calls them in for lunch. They take off the mask and it's a young girl. That's what Spider-Man is. You imbue in him all of the things that you want in the same way that you would a stick figure, as a stick figure could be anyone."

Of course, we now have a half-African-American/half-Latino Spidey in the form of erstwhile Ultimate web-spinner Miles Morales, who after 2015's *Secret Wars* is now firmly ensconced in the main Marvel 616 Universe. "Miles is such a well-developed character thanks to all the hard work that Brian Michael Bendis, Sara Pichelli and the various other artists have put into him," says Slott of Miles Morales's co-creators. "He's incredibly well-rounded, and there's much more to him than just his race. It would also be perfectly fine to have a Peter Parker of any ethnicity. I don't see why he couldn't be Asian, black or anybody, and I also don't see why Miles Morales's thing is that he has to be 'the black Spider-Man.'"

Just as Tom Holland's big screen web-head returns Peter Parker to his high school days in *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, Miles Morales provides the Marvel Universe with its all-important younger Spidey.

THE RE-BIRTH

"Over time, we want these characters to stay the same age," explains Slott. "It's like *The Simpsons*. We want them to be locked in stasis, and then we can always tell these kinds of stories, but when you're telling a comic book story from year to year to year, the characters inevitably start aging, they start progressing. You can't help that. So Peter Parker graduates from high school and then from college, and is out in the real world. At some point, the



Left: One of the best things about Spidey has been how relatable he is for the reader

Below: *Amazing Spider-Man* was put out three times a month – a lot for a comic series

character moves away from the magic that happened when they were first introduced. So by having a young Spider-Man again in Miles Morales, we're able to have the stories be more about youth, and all the problems that Peter had with his secret identity when was in school with all his friends. He's become a modern day version of the original Spider-Man, regardless of race, and that's something that every generation needs."

A lifelong Spider-Man devotee, the 50-year-old was first given the opportunity to fulfil his childhood aspiration of penning the wall-crawler's adventures in 2008 when he joined Bob Gale, Mark Guggenheim and Zeb Wells in the quartet of writers who were assigned the formidable task of rebooting Peter Parker's life in the long-running *Brand New Day* storyline after his long-standing marriage to Mary Jane Watson was erased from continuity in J Michael Straczynski and Joe Quesada's controversial *One More Day* four-part series.

"We were putting *Amazing Spider-Man* out like a relay race three times a month, which was crazy," reflects Slott. "Over time, the other three guys got burn out by how fast that was, and then we got in three new guys and I stayed on, and then the same thing happened again. It's tough putting out a book that quickly, so Marvel decided to take the book down to two issues a month, and just have the one writer. I was surprised that they want me to stay on because I'd already been doing it for quite a long time." With *Brand New Day* winding down, Slott has been flying solo since November 2010's *Amazing Spider-Man* #648, which saw the beginning of the nine-part *Big Time*. Impressively, he has now spent nearly a decade on Spidey's flagship book, rivalling even co-creator Stan Lee's seminal

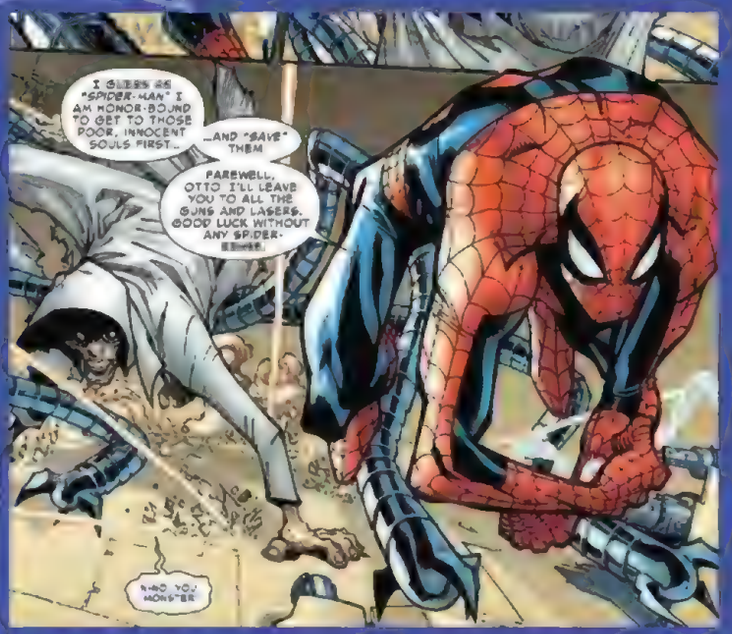
YOU'RE DEALT WITH DOCTOR OCTOPUS TECHNOLOGY BEFORE. WHAT ARE THE WEAKNESSES?
NOW IRON MAN'S ASKING ME FOR TECH SUPPORT? PUNCH ME
THIS IS SERIOUS
SORRY. OTTO CONTROLS HIS BOTS AT SPECIFIC FREQUENCIES. A STRONG ELECTRO MAGNETIC PULSE SHOULD DISRUPT HIS
SO BE IT
ZZZAK
WHAT HE SAID. A COUPLE EMP ARROWS COMING UP
CHOOM
DUDE, DON'T WASTE TIME WITH HEADSHOTS. DO KNOW THE USER
EACH ONE HAS INTERDEPENDENT AI. THE HEAD'S JUST FOR SHOW
TAKING ORDERS FROM PARKER. NEVER GONNA HEAR THE END OF THIS
WOLVERINE: NIL ON THE PARKER-TALK. NOT ALL THE AVENGERS KNOW HIS SECRET IDENTITY.
THANKS, CAP. I KNOW IT'S TOUGH, BUT TRY NOT TO TRIP UP ON "HA". OKAY?
AND SPEAKING OF TRIPPING UP...

Far Left: Amazing Spider-Man #648 was Slott's first time webbing solo

Left: Slott has been working on Spider-Man for a decade

Below: Spidey faces off against Doc Ock

Bottom: Perhaps his most famous foes?


I GUESS AS "SPIDER-MAN" I AM HONOR-BOUND TO GET TO THOSE POOR, INNOCENT SOULS FIRST...
...AND "SAVE" THEM
FAREWELL, OTTO. I'LL LEAVE YOU TO ALL THE GUNS AND LASERS. GOOD LUCK WITHOUT ANY SPIDER-
WHO YOU MONSTER

"HE'S MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER IN ALL OF FICTION"

110-issue run, which started with *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 in March 1963. But despite his longevity on the title, Slott insists that he isn't even close to running out of ideas.

"It's my dream job ever since I was a kid, so it's something I don't ever want to walk away from," he says. "I've always been in love with Spider-Man and he's my favourite character in all of fiction, so take that Hamlet! This is the thing that I've always wanted to do ever since I had my first meeting with Steve Wacker, who was my editor when I first started writing the book on my own. I had a yellow legal pad with me, outlining what I wanted to do on the book going forward. We were talking over lunch, and I was walking him through the first six months of stories. He then says 'what happens next?' so I flip over the page and walk him through the next six months of stories, and Steve's like 'where would you go after that?' So I flip over the page and there's another six months.

He grabs the pad from me and is flipping and flipping through it and 'oh my god, we're going to be here all day!' This is something I've always wanted to do, and I now wake up each morning and it's 'oh, what's Spider-Man going to do

Left: *Brand New Day* saw Slott work with names like Marc Guggenheim and Steve McNiven

Below: MJ comes across new Spider-Man Miles Morales

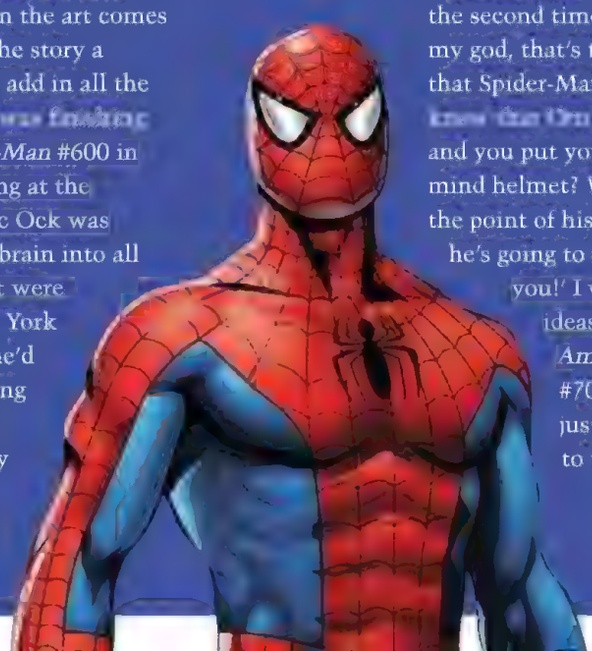
today?' or a year from now because I've got this stuff all mapped out. I love this job!"

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

From the return of familiar foes such as the Lizard, Electro and the Sinister Six to the recently concluded *Clone Conspiracy* mini-series, which not only harked back to '90s epic *The Clone Saga* but also briefly brought back Peter Parker's late lover Gwen Stacy, Slott has also regularly plundered Spidey's colourful past. "Spider-Man has been around since 1962, and it's like using every part of the buffalo," he explains. "I don't think there's any story that's off limits or any character too obscure to go have some fun with. But it's also fun to make up your own characters and stories as it is to put new spins on old things."

Most notably Slott also killed off Peter Parker, audaciously replacing him with Doctor Octopus, as *Amazing Spider-Man* was cancelled in favour of the new *Superior Spider-Man* in January 2013. "That was crazy!" he laughs. "The way I work on stories is Marvel style, where you write out the plot and everything you want the artist to draw, and then when the art comes in, you then write the story a second time, as you add in all the [illegible] and dialogue. I was finishing off *Amazing Spider-Man* #600 in 2009 and was looking at the sequence where Doc Ock was dying. He'd put his brain into all these machines that were going to make New York run perfectly after he'd died, which was going to be his gift to the city, this completely automated city. But it's Doc Ock so everything goes completely wrong, and the city of New York was fighting Spider-Man."

At the end of the story, Spider-Man foolishly puts on Doctor Octopus's mind helmet. "He's trying to take control of the machines and shut them all down," continues Slott. "I was looking at it the second time, and I was like 'oh my god, that's the stupidest thing that Spider-Man could do! You know that Otto Octavius is dying and you put your brainwaves in his mind helmet? When it comes to the point of his death, you know he's going to swap minds with you!' I was typing out these ideas and I knew what *Amazing Spider-Man* #700 would be. It was just a matter of getting to that point." ›



Above: *One More Day* connected the three then publishes Spider-Man storylines

Top-right: Harry Osborn was Peter's best friend through most of the series

Just as the currently comatose Tony Stark has maintained a presence as Riri Williams' trustee AI in Invincible Iron Man, Peter remained a part of *Superior Spider-Man*, this time as a disembodied spirit. "In the first issue, Otto is Spider-Man and is about to do something truly awful, and suddenly a ghostly hand stops him, and we see that it's the ghost of Peter Parker," recalls Slott. "He tells Otto 'I don't know what's going on but I'm going to get my body back eventually and in the meantime I'm not going to let you do evil.' Eventually, Otto figures out that this ghost is part of Peter Parker's repressed memories, which are still in his brain. So he goes into his own brain to battle Peter, and in the end, he expunges him and kills him again, so we had a nine-month gap where everyone assumed the ghost was how we were going to get Peter back."

CLASH OF WORLDS

Peter's predicament led to a potentially awkward situation when Slott met former cinematic Spidey, Andrew Garfield, on the set of 2014's *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. "The way I was introduced to him was 'this is the guy who writes Amazing Spider-Man,' and the first thing he said to me was 'wait, so you killed me?'" laughs Slott. "I explained to him what the deal was with the ghost, and he goes 'so I'm a ghost now?' I then said 'well, we killed the ghost last week!' I love comics when you get to say things like that, as it's just so wonderfully ludicrous! I can do anything in a comic book!"

But when pressed on whether Doctor Octopus or Normal Osborn's Green Goblin is Spider-Man's most formidable adversary, Slott surprisingly claims that it is neither of them. "Peter has got one big nemesis, as he has no greater enemy that himself," he reasons. >

CHIP ZDARSKY IS SPECTACULAR

For the first time since *Brand New Day*'s clean slate resulted in the demise of Sensational Spider-Man and Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man, Marvel last month launched their first ongoing companion title to *Amazing Spider-Man* in almost ten years. Drawn by Adam Kubert, *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man* is scripted by Sex Criminals artist Chip Zdarsky, who is fresh off a stint on Marvel's other famous Peter's solo adventures. However, he doesn't believe that the Webspinner has much in common with leading Guardian of the Galaxy, Star-Lord.

"Ultimately, Peter Parker is racked by guilt," says Zdarsky. "He needs to save everyone and, while he enjoys aspects of being Spider-Man, it's not as rooted in thrill-seeking as Peter Quill's pursuits are."

Describing Dan Slott as "the architect of Peter's world," Zdarsky will be reacting to events in Spider-Man's core title. "My goal with *Spectacular* is to be like a branch coming off of *Amazing* that maybe has a lighter touch, while maintaining the feeling of high stakes that a book like *Amazing* brings," he explains. "I want it to be able to pick it up no matter where you last left off and still feel at home. Part of that is grounding Peter more in New York City, and weaving in familiar supporting characters and villains, and maintaining a classic Spidey vibe."

However, Zdarsky is reluctant to reveal precisely what foes and other supporting characters will show up, although Mary Jane Watson and the Vulture were featured in the recent Free Comic Book Day story. "I don't want to give anything away, but long-time Spidey fans will be pretty happy with everyone who pops up, both friends and enemies," he teases, hinting that most New Yorkers have grown wary of Spidey's constant disruptive escapades.

"The city's citizens are jaded, and Spider-Man is kind of the mascot they never asked for," he laughs. "He saves them continuously, but they're always flip-flopping on whether he's the hero they need or the menace they put up with. It's a ton of fun playing with that dynamic, and there's a small scene coming up in #3 that, to me, sums up Spidey's relationship with New York."

"ULTIMATELY, PETER PARKER IS RACKED BY GUILT, HE NEEDS TO SAVE EVERYONE"

AMAZING FANTASY
12¢
15 AUG
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THOUGH THE WORLD MAY MOCK PETER PARKER, THE TIMID TEEN-AGER...
SPIDER MAN
...IT WILL SOON MARVEL AT THE AWESOME MIGHT OF... SPIDER-MAN!
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:
AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO YOU, FROM THE EDITOR--ABOUT THE NEW AMAZING!

Above: Amazing Fantasy was Spider-Man's first appearance

"THERE'S ALWAYS SOAP OPERA IN SPIDER-MAN'S LIFE, AND THAT'S WHY WE KEEP COMING BACK FOR MORE"

Right: Tom Holland brings Spider-Man back to the cinema screen this summer in *Spider-Man: Homecoming*

"There is no one who can mess up Spider-Man's world more than Spider-Man. Dating back to his early days when he let the burglar run by him because it wasn't worth his time to catch him," he continues, referring to Spider-Man's formative experience in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, where he fatefully refuses a security guard's plea to help them apprehend a suspect, who later goes on to murder Peter's Uncle Ben.

LESSON LEARNT

"At the end of the story he learns that 'with great power comes great responsibility.' But he doesn't automatically reset his brain, which means that it is something that he has to strive for. He always has that instinct to do the thing that's easiest; the thing that will help him get what he wants the most. It's a constant struggle for him to do the right thing, although he will try and do that because deep down he's a good person. It was a lesson he was forced to learn, and when left to his own devices or when he's not thinking clearly, he sometimes does something for his own advantage, takes a shortcut or lets his emotions get the better of him. If J Jonah Jameson is yelling at him, he'll web his mouth or put webbing on his chair. That kind of stuff always comes back to bite him, but he can't stop being who he is, although he always wants to be a better person."

Nevertheless, Slott really believes that Spider-Man has much more in common with Doctor Octopus than he does with his more sinister nemesis Norman Osborn. "Otto Octavius is what Peter Parker would have been like if he hadn't been bitten by a radioactive spider," he suggests. "When you see that first story in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, Peter is the nerdy kid with glasses, who none of the other kids treat well. He's on his way to the lab, kicking a can and going 'one day I'll show them one day, they'll regret making fun of me!' That's the same character as Otto, who uses his mind to get ahead. Part of Otto's thinking is 'I'll come up with some great inventions and be heralded as a genius.' So much of Doc Ock is about proving himself to be superior to others, and there's so much insecurity in that."

"THE RETURN OF THE GREEN GOBLIN!"
RUGGEDLY WRITTEN BY: STAN LEE
ROBUSTLY DRAWN BY: STEVE DITKO
RECENTLY LETTERED BY: S. ROSEN
STAN AND STEVE DO IT AGAIN!!
BE SURE TO READ THIS YARN CAREFULLY, FOR IT'S CERTAIN TO BE DISCUSSED AND ARGUED ABOUT BY SPIDEY FANS THROUGHOUT THE FREE WORLD FOR A LONG TIME TO COME!
LOOK AT OL' BOOKWORM PARKER! THE WAY HE'S GLUED TO THAT CHEAP BOOK, YOU'D THINK HE WAS READIN' THE LATEST JAMES BOND MYSTERY!
IT'S BEEN MONTHS SINCE I HAD THAT BATTLE WITH THE GREEN GOBLIN! I WONDER WHAT BECAME OF HIM? WHY HASN'T HE BEEN HEARD FROM SINCE?!
SEE ME AFTER CLASS, KIDS! OL' FLASH HAS SOME BIG NEWS FOR YOU!!
* SEE SPIDER-MAN #14... EDITOR.
X-777

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP 12¢
THE MOST ORIGINAL SUPER-HERO OF ALL TIME!
IN THIS GREAT ISSUE YOU WILL MEET...
ELECTRO
A MENACE SO POWERFUL THAT SPIDER-MAN'S STRENGTH IS HELPLESS AGAINST HIM!
BOOK-LENGTH COMIC COLOSSAL, PROVING AGAIN THAT THIS IS INDEED THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS!
A SCENE YOU WILL NEVER FORGET! SEE... THE DEFEAT OF SPIDER-MAN!

However, that is not the case with the Green Goblin. "Norman Osborn knows he's the best, and he's going to conquer the world of tomorrow," adds Skrtic. "He's always manipulating things but Spider-Man keeps getting in his way."

Brought to life in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* by Michael Keaton, Skrtic has never really rated the Vulture. "I used to make fun of the Vulture, and he was the one villain I avoided writing, because I thought he was silly," he admits. "He was an old man who flies, and when Spider-Man first fought him, Peter was still a 15-year old kid in high school. By the time Peter was out of grad school, the Vulture would have been even older, so it would have been like Spider-Man beating up his grandfather."

Skrtic was persuaded to tackle the Vulture by Marvel Executive Editor Tom Brevoort. "He told me, 'This is a character created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, and he's fantastic so you just need to get inside his head,'" he says. "So I wrote a Vulture story and suddenly it was like 'I love the Vulture now!' He's like a bird of prey, who is going to scrounge and pick at the carcass, as he feels like life has denied him. He's also kind of stupid, because if you built a suit that allows you to fly, why are you still the way for a billion dollars instead of robbing banks? This is a character who first appeared in 1963, but we live in an age now where we're talking about drones bringing you packages, so imagine if some guy could deliver your pizza by flying to your house!"

Above Spider-Man has some of the most iconic enemies in all comic books, from the Green Goblin to Electro.

Whether it be Mary Jane Watson, Gwen Stacy or police detective Carly Cooper, Superior Spider-Man foil Anna Maria Marconi or currently Bobbi Morse, aka Mockingbird, the women in Peter's life have always played an important role. "There will always be someone there, as that's been part of the magic of Amazing Spider-Man since the '60s in that it's secretly a romance comic," laughs Skrtic. "Peter gets on a costume and fights crime, but it's very much 'oh my god, I've got a date and I'm not ready for it' or 'Aunt May is sick and needs her medicine,' or 'how am I going to pay my rent?' There's always soap opera in Spider-Man's life, and that's why we keep coming back for more."

SPINNING A WEB OF ROMANCE

Legendary artist John Romita Sr tells **Joseph McCabe** the secret origin of Spider-Man's leading ladies...

Opposite: Spider-Gwen has been taken the comic world by storm in her own universe

Above: MJ and Peter's relationship started in *Amazing Spider-Man* #143

Right: Peter comes across an alternate Gwen and relives her death

Behind every great man is a great woman. But in the case of *Spider-Man*, the credit goes to two women: Gwen Stacy and Mary Jane Watson. Both changed Peter Parker's life, taking him from adolescence to manhood. And both owe much of their success to Marvel Comics legend 'Jazzy' John Romita, who began penciling *Spider-Man* when the character's co-creator, artist Steve Ditko, left the title.

"I tried for a few months to ghost his style," Romita tells us from his home in Long Island, New York. "But it was very foreign to me, because he used the pen a lot and I used the brush. So it gradually turned into my style. Thank God the fans didn't lynch me."

Any readers skeptical of Romita's talents were silenced by his depiction of Mary Jane when she first appeared in November 1966's *The Amazing Spider-Man #42*. Her arrival had been teased for several months...

"You never saw her face before Ditko left. When I took the book over – the second or third issue in – Stan said, 'Let's bring Mary Jane into it.' The first thing I wanted to do was make her a redhead. Because at the time Ann-Margret was up and coming, and the closest thing to what Stan wanted. Stan

"THE CREDIT GOES TO TWO WOMEN: GWEN & MJ"

ALL THIS TIME--I'VE BEEN FEELING SORRY FOR MYSELF --UNWILLING TO ADMIT--I WAS JUST CARRYING A KING-SIZED TORCH-- FOR YOU!
OH, PETER--PETER --IT WAS AS THOUGH MY WHOLE WORLD HAD COME TO AN END!
BUT, NOT ANY MORE--!
SUDDENLY--WITH YOU IN MY ARMS AGAIN--EVERYTHING SEEMS RIGHT AGAIN!
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS NOW--NO MATTER WHAT NEW PROBLEMS MAY COME ALONG--THEY WON'T MEAN A THING!
DON'T TALK, MR. PARKER! JUST HOLD ME-- SO YOU WON'T SEE ME CRY!
MINUTES LATER, AFTER OUR CUDDLING COUPLE HAVE REGAINED THEIR COMPOSURE-
I CAN'T LET YOU GO SO SOON, GWENDY!
IT'LL TASTE LIKE NECTAR WITH YOU-- MAN O' MINE!
HOW ABOUT SOME JAVA-- AT THE COFFEE BEAN?

wanted Mary Jane to be a go-go dancer. In movies, Ann-Margret was go-go dancing and singing, so I just used her as a general model. I used the red hair and dimples and cleft in her chin, and I was thinking of Ann-Margret when I did the original sketch."

With her arrival, a love triangle developed between the fun-loving MJ, Peter, and straight-laced Gwen.

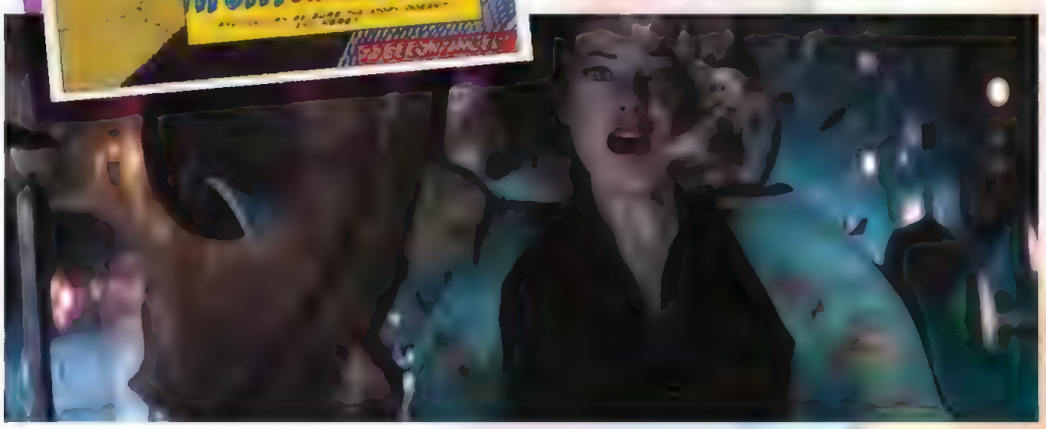
"When we got a good reaction to Mary Jane Watson," says Romita, "Stan was happy and the assumption between us, whenever we plotted anything, was that she was probably gonna be Peter's girlfriend. But somewhere along the way I made Gwen look so good he decided he would like to have Gwen be Peter's girlfriend. Stan asked me to make Gwen as vibrant and as exciting looking as Mary Jane was. I was making Gwen the studious one, a police captain's daughter. She was prim and proper, and I thought that was a great contrast between the two girls. But Stan suddenly asked me to make Gwen exciting. Then I started putting her in miniskirts. I even gave her Mary Jane's hair comb, only with blonde hair.

"We tried that for a long time, and Stan kept saying, 'Why does Mary Jane still look more interesting than Gwen?' I said, 'I'm doing the best I can! I don't know why!' For some reason, I was unable to do the same thing with Gwen as I did with Mary Jane. When I made Gwen smile like an idiot it didn't look right. It's like making an actor do something that's not natural for them. I thought of these characters as so real that I couldn't make Gwen act like a dancing fool in a miniskirt. I did some stories where she was every bit as silly-looking as Mary Jane, but it never worked. There was something in me that I couldn't help. We finally said, 'Oh the hell with it!'"

Above: Gwen Stacy was first introduced as the All-American sweetheart, and Peter's first love

Several years later – when Lee turned *Spider-Man*'s scripting over to Gerry Conway and Romita became Marvel's de facto art director – Peter and Gwen's relationship came to a tragic end

"PETER & GWEN'S RELATIONSHIP CAME TO A TRAGIC END"



with her death at the hands of the Green Goblin.

"Somebody said, 'We would like Aunt May to die. We want to shake up the readership.' Gerry and I got to plotting, and he said, 'They want to kill Aunt May.' I told him, 'Gerry, that's crazy. If you kill Aunt May there won't be any remnant of the teenage Peter Parker, of him worried sick about his aunt finding out his secret or dying on him.'

"So I told Gerry, 'If you want my opinion' – and I didn't demand it, I just told him – 'I think the best thing to do would be to kill Gwen if we want to shake up the readership. If Mary Jane dies they won't care. Maybe some people would complain, but it wouldn't be a shocker. And if Aunt May dies it wouldn't really bother them because she's such a pain in the neck to the readers. He immediately latched onto it and said he thought I was right. So we wrote it as Gwen…"

While Gwen's death devastated Peter, it allowed Mary Jane to mature, ultimately leading to her 1987 marriage to the superhero…

"Mary Jane was never down. She was always up. She was always hopping around and leaving people in the lurch. But after Gwen died, Mary Jane grew up. I thought that one of the best things that was ever done was when Gerry had Mary Jane suddenly make a turnaround, and instead of running for the hills when the tragedy struck with Gwen, she stayed in the room and tried to help Peter. I thought that was when she grew up."

Romita believes actress Kirsten Dunst captured both sides of MJ when the character made her big-screen debut in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* films…

"I was very happy with Kirsten Dunst's performance as MJ. I think she's as close as we could have gotten to her. She was absolutely great. She's got Mary Jane's toothpaste smile, but she could be serious; and she had to be serious in the films."

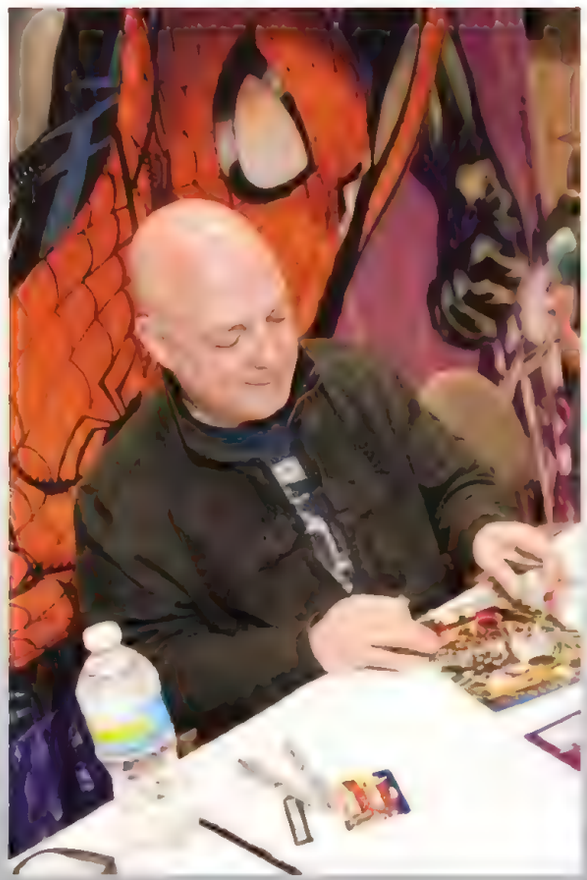
With a new Mary Jane expected in Marvel's reboot of the *Spider-Man* film franchise (starting with this summer's upcoming *Spider-Man: Homecoming*), the 87-year-old Romita remains modest when acknowledging the influence his work has had on decades of directors and storytellers…

"I thought I was a generic artist," he laughs, "an advertising artist, where everybody has a toothpaste smile and a straight tie. I always felt like my stuff lacked grit. If I brought anything to the table it was storytelling and character. I would get inside the characters. I would throw all my imagination completely into the characters – as I told you, I couldn't make Gwen be any different than she should be. I think that's what guys have emulated. If they use some of my storytelling and composition tricks I'm very pleased."

Top left: Stabbing many fans in the heart, Gwen Stacy fell to her death with Peter unable to save her

Above left: *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, starring Emma Stone as Gwen, duplicated the comic book

Top right: Romita Sr believes that Kirsten Dunst perfectly captured MJ's personality traits

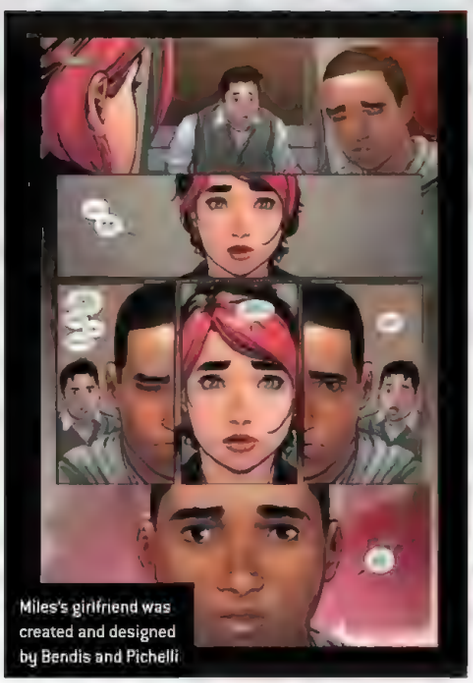


JOINING THE DOTS

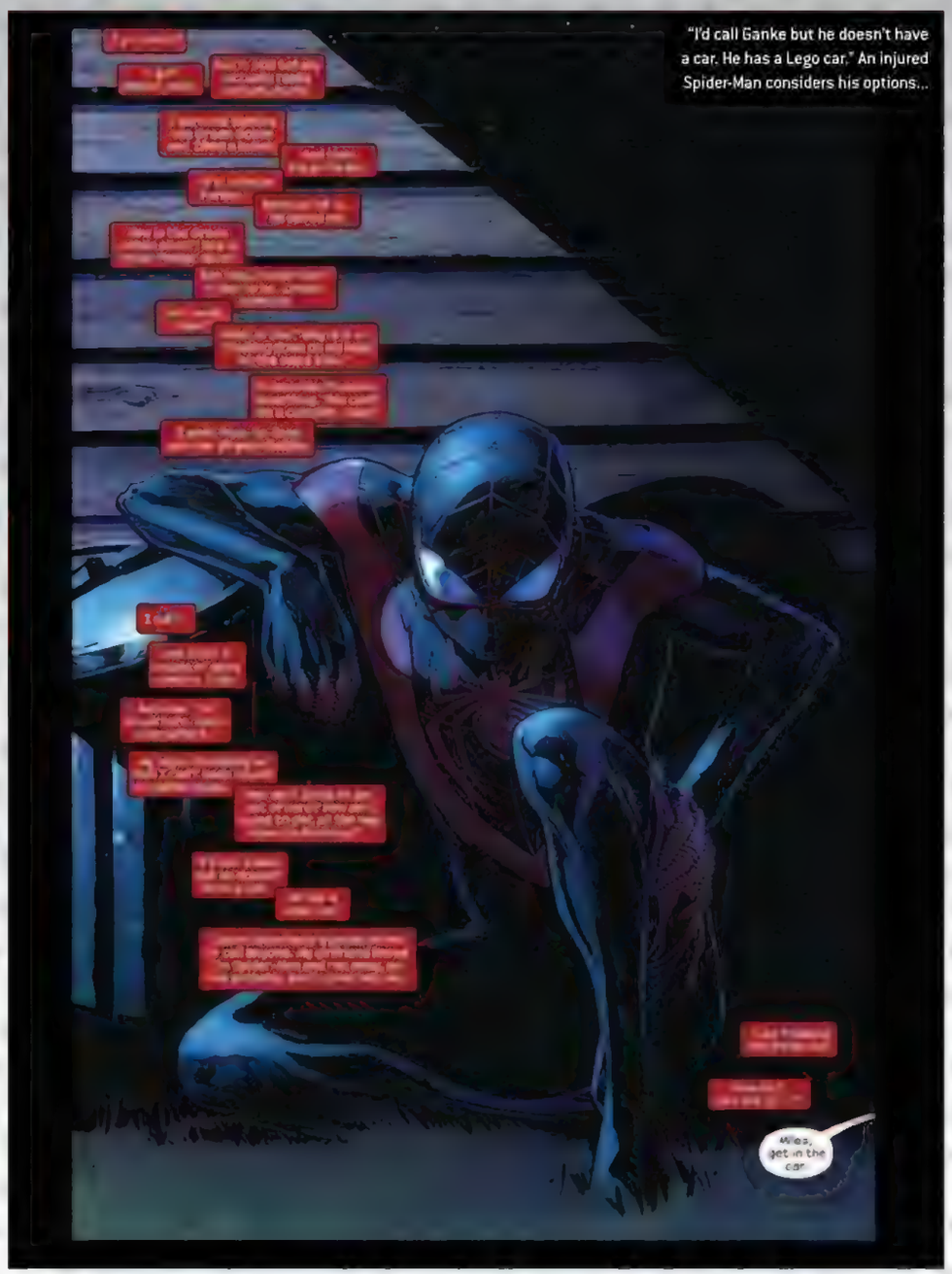
Brian Michael Bendis tells **Stephen Jewell** about how Spider-Men, Defenders and Jessica Jones adventures are all one big story

After writing 133 issues of *Ultimate Spider-Man*, Brian Michael Bendis has been chronicling Miles Morales' adventures in the main Marvel 616 Universe for the past 18 months. Having also teamed the half Puerto-Rican, half African-American 16-year-old wall-crawler up with the original web-head Peter Parker in 2012's *Spider-Men*, the pair are set to meet again in this month's *Spider-Men 2*. And if that wasn't enough Spidey action, one or maybe both of the arachnid heroes will play a supporting role in Bendis and David Marquez's new *Defenders* series, which, like its forthcoming small-screen equivalent, centres around the superpowered ensemble of Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage and Iron Fist.

"WE WERE NEVER GOING TO BRING ULTIMATE PETER BACK"



Miles's girlfriend was created and designed by Bendis and Pichelli



"I'd call Ganke but he doesn't have a car. He has a Lego car." An injured Spider-Man considers his options...

How have you enjoyed your time with the Miles Morales character in the main Marvel Universe?

It's worked out well. I was nervous about it at first and I had even left the book at one point because I imagined it was time to go. But I can't imagine that now because I'm so invested in the stories that we're telling, and the levels on which we're telling the stories. Miles's voice is so different from Peter's, and the supporting cast – and the stories that came with them – are so different from Peter's as well.

You first introduced Miles in 2011 after the death of the Ultimate Universe Peter Parker. Were there ever any plans to resurrect Ultimate Peter?

We were never going to bring Ultimate Peter back. That was never going to happen in a traditional sense, so I was grateful when the decision was made to fold the Ultimate Universe after sixteen very exciting years of my life; that Marvel were going to pull Miles, the Maker (evil Ultimate Reed Richards) and some other things that I'm really proud of out of the wreckage and give them new life.

Are you pleased about how enthusiastically the fans have embraced Miles?

How people have responded to Miles has been even more amazing than the worldwide acceptance of Jessica Jones. Last week I was in the Sony offices, looking at the animated Spider-Man movie starring Miles Morales that's coming out late next year. It was really crazy to think that Miles was originally just me, the artist Sara Pichelli and the editors at Marvel, and now it's literally hundreds of people working on this

Supervillain Wilson Fisk, otherwise known as the Kingpin

Even superheroes suffer relationship problems, apparently

The Punisher and Daredevil have a bloody square off

beautiful piece of animation that I saw, and now we're only a year and a half away from a major motion picture.

The *Spider-Man: Homecoming* movie also takes a lot from *Ultimate Spider-Man* with Peter Parker once again in high school...

You think? There are a lot of things in the movie that look like a genuine valentine to some of the stuff we did in *Ultimate Spider-Man*. In the trailer, there's stuff that's shot for shot, and I'm immensely proud of that. Everyone's going to be celebrating Spider-Man and there's been a lot of love towards our work, and we want to help celebrate it with new work.

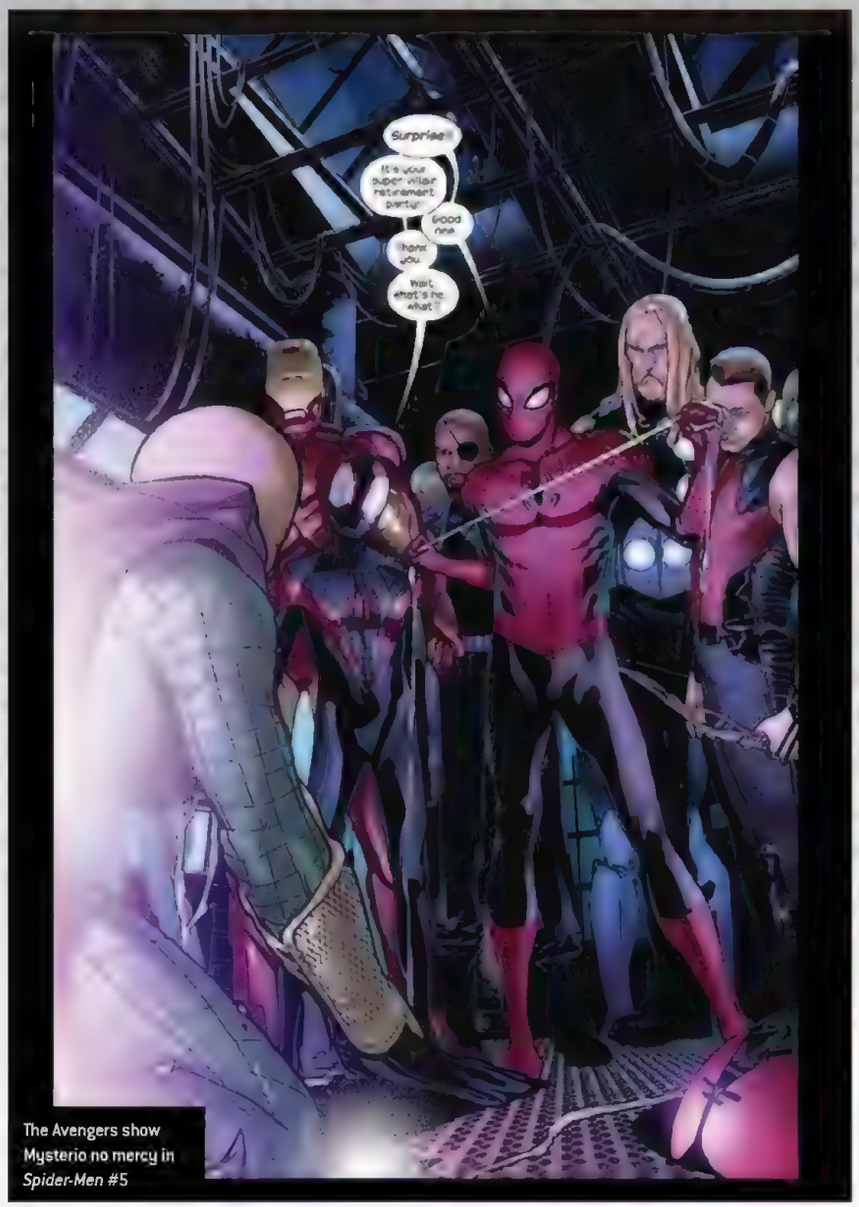
Although he's called Ned Leeds, Peter Parker's friend in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* bears a strong resemblance to Miles's Korean-American best buddy, Ganke Lee?

We just paid tribute to that in *Spider-Man* #16 as Ganke has a new romantic interest, but he can't tell her who he is or she'll figure out who Spider-Man is. She says to him, "Just give me a name," and he goes"Alright, you can call me Ned!"

How did you first come to create the character Ganke?

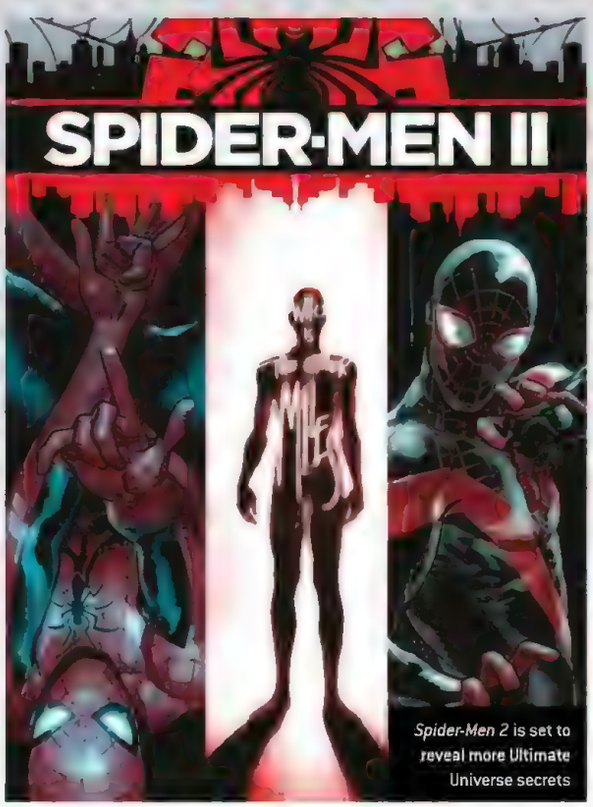
I was building the world around Miles and thinking about the friendships in my life and the things I've seen that I wanted to reflect more in my work. I've had a friendship like Miles and Ganke with Izzy Schachner, and we're still dear friends. It's a really good feeling, when you start >

Daredevil to the rescue in yet another *Amazing Fantasy* #15 homage



The Avengers show Mysterio no mercy in *Spider-Men* #5

Bendis cites both Marquez and Pichelli as composed artists



Spider-Men 2 is set to reveal more Ultimate Universe secrets

looking back and go 'I've been friends with that person for 35 years!' So Ganke was based on my friendship with Izzy but the name comes from my daughter, who went to school with someone called Ganke, who was quite the class clown. I would pick her up from school and all the way home all I would hear was "Ganke put an apple down his pants!" or "Ganke pretended to throw up!" Clearly, my six-year-old daughter had a crush on this boy, so I said to her, "You really like Ganke?" and she goes "You like Ganke!" It was really funny and after months of hearing that name literally every day, I was thinking "Ganke! Ganke!" so when it came time to name him, it was Ganke, as I just had to get that name out of my head.

It's been five years since the first mini-series, so *Spider-Men 2* has been a long time in the making...

I've always wanted to do it, and the original intention of the last page of the previous series – in which Peter Parker Googles the 616 Miles Morales – was to open up the opportunity to do more story, but not so much that if I never got around to it for some reason, it wouldn't torture people too badly. I've always had a whole thing I wanted to do, and there was even talk at one point of it being an ongoing series, as there's a lot of story you can do with this scenario. But it does feel like another five-issue mini-series is a better fit, as this makes it more special.

Does the fact that Peter and Miles now inhabit the same universe have a bearing on what unfolds?

With Miles coming to the 616, I wasn't sure at first if there was a real point to the series, but actually there's double the point to it now. They're both in the same space, trying to define themselves as Spider-Man, so now we have a story to tell. They've actually already met in *Amazing Spider-Man* with all the Spider-Verse stuff that was going on. I also had them meet up early on in the 616 re-

Bendis has worked with several incarnations of the Spider-Men

Can two Spider-Men successfully exist in the same universe?

His Guardians work extends past the team we're used to

> **"THEY'RE HILARIOUS TOGETHER, AND GENUINELY HONEST WITH EACH OTHER"**

launch of Spider-Man, and because I knew that *Spider-Men* was coming but it was going to be a way-aways, I wanted to establish what their relationship was now that Miles is here, and then get that out of the way. But establish it enough, so that it was more like a baseline, which we can then build on in this new series.

Spider-Men was more character-led than plot-driven, as it examined the nature of being Spider-Man from Miles's and Peter's points of view. Will _Spider-Men 2_ emulate that tone?

What was surprising about *Spider-Men* was how emotional it got, as it kind of crept up on you. You thought you were going to get a good old-fashioned team-up, and then it became more like this healing book that was dealing with tragedy. You can't force that kind of thing; it has to just happen with the characters, as they kind of just took over. There's something very emotional about what Miles and Peter have been through, and what they share and know about each other. Every time I start writing them, they're hilarious together, and genuinely honest and emotional with each other.

Was Sara Pichelli always going to return for _Spider-Men 2_?

There wasn't even a list! I knew she was enjoying being back on *Spider-Man*, and I also knew that she enjoyed the more emotional work. Speaking again as to why *Spider-Men* was so creatively successful, it was because Sara nailed every single panel. When it comes to characters acting with emotions, some artists – because they are cartoonists as well – will tend to over-dramatise the emotions. Like David Marquez and a lot of the other artists I work with, Sara is more composed and subtle with her character acting. She's an excellent character artist, and is also an excellent character designer. Speaking of which, one of the surprises of *Spider-Men 2* is that we're introducing Miles's brand-new girlfriend, who has been created and designed by Sara and myself.

With David Marquez, after working with him on both _Invincible Iron Man_ »

Bendis has finished a four-year run writing *Guardians* adventures

> **"WRITING THE TALKING RACCOON WAS ALWAYS A BIT OF A HEAD-TURN FOR PEOPLE"**

and *Civil War 2*, was it a natural progression for you both to collaborate again on *Defenders*?

It's funny because originally a couple of people were like, 'David is one of the premiere superhero artists of this generation, so should he be doing street-level stuff?' But I said, 'Yes, he should, for specifically that reason.' We'd just come off of several years of big superhero work, which came to a peak with *Civil War 2*, which was an enormous task for David, and the biggest thing he's ever done, so coming back down to the streets was very attractive to him. I also knew that there were other styles he wanted to try, and *Defenders* allows him to do that. We then talked to our colourist, Justin Ponsor, about the movies we both loved, and this kind of neon-noir style we wanted to use with these really bright colours in the darkness, which would be a bit like Wong Kar-Wai or *Drive*.

Is *Defenders* a change of pace for you after recently concluding your four-year run on *Guardians of the Galaxy*?

It was exactly that idea, that you want to keep challenging yourself. It's surprising to people who knew me from my earliest work that I was even writing *Guardians* at all, because I'd come from crime comics, and I'm known for edgier fare like *Jessica Jones*. So writing the talking raccoon and walking-tree book was always a bit of a head-turn for people, even though to me it's all just writing. I now get to write the grittiest epic I've ever written for Marvel since I started out with *Ultimate Spider-Man* in 2000, and that includes my runs on *Daredevil* and *Jessica Jones*.

Will your *Defenders* take any cues from the upcoming Netflix series?

I've read the *Defenders* TV scripts, and what we're doing is very different in terms of the kind of story we're telling,

Bendis enjoys coming back to reality after *Guardians* escapades

Bendis' work also extends to venturing into Hell's Kitchen with Daredevil

Ultimate Spider-Man has also spawned its own animated series

but it's still similar in that it's about these four characters interacting.

Will it also be different to the *Defenders*' numerous past iterations?

This isn't your grandma's *Defenders*! It's a sprawling *Godfather*-style epic on the streets featuring these four characters. But the biggest difference is that they're just the basis of a much larger canvas of characters, as in the first three issues alone, Blade, Paladin, Punisher, Moon Knight, Eva Bell and Spider-Men all pop up. I really enjoyed my time in space with *Guardians*, but there's something very exciting about coming back to reality, as the streets are populated with all these really interesting characters.

***Defenders* has been a pretty oddball book in the past...**

I've liked all the runs of *Defenders*, even when it's been at its most kooky. But we're much less kooky and much more streamlined. Even my *Daredevil* run still used the map that Frank Miller laid out in the early Eighties in terms of how the crime world of the Marvel Universe works, in that it's headed up by Wilson Fisk, and then underneath is everyone else fighting for territory. Charles Soule has something going on in *Daredevil* at the moment that allows us to blow up that map, and to create a new map that's more reflective of a modern crime comic and a modern sensibility of what's going on in the world.

In *Jessica Jones*, she and Luke are currently estranged, so will that factor into *Defenders*?

Jessica and Luke are definitely on the outs right now, and that will be reflected in *Defenders*. The idea of Jessica joining a team on any level is certainly not in her way, or by the way in Daredevil or Danny Rand's way either. But they're all reeling from the events of the Free Comic Book Day issue, and are quite knocked out by what happens. Luke has to deal with the insanity of Diamondback being back as the new Kingpin, and the first thing he does is attack his family.

You're currently exploring the after-affects of the end of the Ultimate Universe in *Jessica Jones*, so will that sub-plot be reflected in *Defenders* and indeed *Spider-Man* as well?

If you're buying all three books, there's a massive story going on that involves all of them, but told from different angles. But if you don't then you'll never know that while the Defenders are fighting the Kingpin over here, Miles Morales was fighting Black Cat over there, and it's all connected. I'm under exclusive contract at Marvel, so I know I've got quite a few issues to play with; I can do a little more for the audience than some other writers are able to, and I want to try and take advantage of that.

WHERE THERE'S MUCK THERE'S BRASS

They trudge. They ooze. They almost certainly smell bad. They're swamp monsters, and they've been a strange, distinctive subgenre of comics since the 1940s, shambling their way through numerous different titles, evoking fear and pity, sometimes both at once, along with the occasional laugh. **James Lovegrove** countdowns of the ten most notable

The SWAMP SPIRIT
GHOSTS, TOBOGANS, WITCHES—ALL KINDS OF COMMON AND FANTASTIC EVIL CREATURES ARE KNOWN TO MAN. BUT ONLY A FEW HAVE EVER HEARD OF THE SWAMP SPIRIT...
...AND WHEN THE NAME IS MENTIONED THESE FEW TURN ASHEN AND CHANGE THE SUBJECT!
LET'S CHANGE THE SUBJECT. FRANKENSTEIN IS ON THE RADIO NOW... KNOWN AS THE BOOO! IT'S A HORROR PROGRAM RUN BY ROGER RODGERS AND RADIO AUDIENCES FAR AND WIDE ARE THRILLED BY RODGERS AND THE BOOO!
DID YOU SAY... THE... SWAMP SPIRIT?? E-E-EK. AH. CHUCKLE. SO-SO DO NEITHER WE'VE BEEN HAVING... (SIGH) HMM?
BUT MA! I WANT TO HEAR THE BOOO!
NO, EPHRAIM... IT'S TOO GRUESOME!

10 SWAMP SPIRIT

First appearance: Frankenstein #16 (1948)
Created by: Dick Briefer

Frankenstein (okay, pedants, Frankenstein's monster) starred in an eponymous humour title from Prize Comics, characterised as a big, well-meaning lunk. In this short, one-off tale, the creepy radio show which Frankenstein and his friend Roger Rodgers co-present is broadcasting live from Borgo Swamp. Their plan is to record an encounter with a shuddersome inhabitant the Swamp Spirit.

The creature attacks, and Frankenstein, in the process of defeating it, gets so covered with mud that locals mistake him for the bog beastie. When the truth is revealed, Frankenstein and Roger are accused of perpetrating a hoax, and their show is cancelled. Moral of the story? Don't mess with swamp monsters unless there's a shower handy.

9 MUCK MONSTER

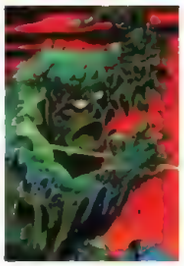
First appearance: Marvel Team-Up #91 (1980)
Created by: Steven Grant and Pat Broderick

The Muck Monster – a dead ringer for a certain Man-Thing – makes a blink-and-you'll-miss-it cameo appearance in issue #91 of *Marvel Team-Up* as part of a carnival sideshow. Among the audience is one Peter Parker, who then, in the guise of his arachnid alter ego, joins forces with Ghost Rider to combat the soul-stealing menace of Moondark the Magician.

The Muck Monster gets a larger role in 1991's *Marvel Tales #256*, which reprints the *Team-Up* story and adds a brand new back-up feature. The latter strip, written by future Spider-scribe supreme Dan Slott, pits the quagmire Quasimodo and a couple of his fellow carny freaks (six-armed Six and apelike Gorilla Girl) against Hulk foes Hammer and Anvil. There have been no further sightings of the character in recent years. Maybe Man-Thing sued over copyright infringement.

8 IT!

First appearance: Supernatural Thrillers #1 (1972)
Created by: Theodore Sturgeon

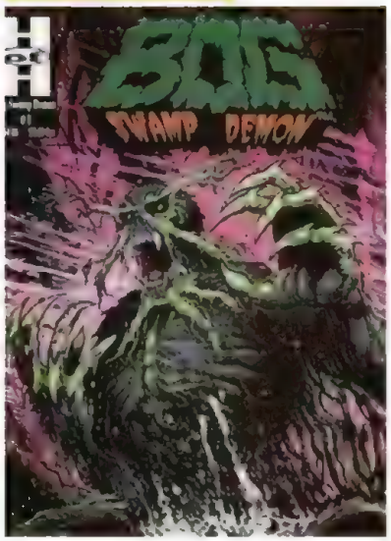


It! is the seminal swamp-monster short story by SF grandmaster Theodore Sturgeon. First published in a 1940 issue of pulp magazine *Unknown*, the tale centres on a plant-based monstrosity which has coalesced around a human skeleton and terrorises a backwoods community before being destroyed by water.

The comics adaptation, in the debut issue of Marvel's principal Bronze Age horror anthology series *Supernatural Thrillers*, is faithful to the source material. Writer Roy Thomas reproduces plenty of Sturgeon's lush and measured prose, to the accompaniment of sumptuously detailed art by Marie Severin and Frank Giacoia.

7 BOG, SWAMP DEMON

First appearance: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Vol. 2 #4 (1994)
Created by: Ryan Brown



Beginning life as a back-up feature in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, Bog swiftly graduated to his own title, published by indie outfit Hall of Heroes. Bog's true name is Bauggroth and he's a lesser demon who inhabits a body made of earth, weeds and wood, having clawed his way up out of Hell by means of... But let Bog himself explain how he managed it: "Through an ancient, twisted alchemy, I conjured forth a force rooted deep in the Chaldean enchantments! And mingling it with the sorcerous soup in this Circean swamp, I've become what I am today...!!"

Bog is, clearly, more verbose than the average gloop golem, but that and a dollop of religious angst aside, his adventures are fairly – wait for it – bog-standard.

6 BOG BEAST

First appearance: Tales of Evil #2 (1975)
Created by: John Albano and Jack Sparling

The Atlas Comics line was never slow in cribbing from its competitors. At a time when swamp monsters were all the rage, an Atlas version was inevitable, and thus was born Bog Beast.

Bog Beast differs from his inspirations in that he is an explorer from a subterranean realm who has come to the surface world. His mission is to study humankind and save his own race, who are being killed by gas seeping from the Earth's core. The mute Bog Beast is a sensitive soul, as appalled by our capacity for violence as the people he encounters are appalled by his hideous appearance.

5 THE GLOB

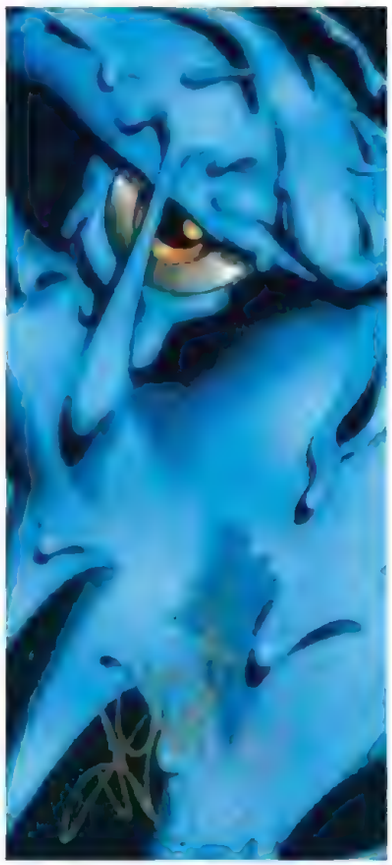
First appearance: Incredible Hulk #121 (1969)
Created by: Roy Thomas and Herb Trimpe

The Glob is petty criminal Joe Timms who, having escaped prison, seeks refuge in the Florida Everglades. There, thanks to some pesky radioactive waste, he is transformed into a mindless, shaggy swamp beast and goes toe-to-toe with the Hulk before being destroyed by an experimental anti-radiation fluid – although he is soon resurrected, because you can't keep a good bog creature down.

Roy Thomas dreamed up the Glob as a homage to Golden Age mire monster The Heap and originally wanted to call his creation the Shape until Stan Lee persuaded him that the Glob was a better name. Perhaps fittingly, the Glob battled that other mucky Everglades resident, Man-Thing, in the sniggersomely-named *Giant-Size Man-Thing #1*.

4 SLUDGE

First appearance: Sludge #1 (1993)
Created by: Steve Gerber



Sludge was Steve Gerber's second bite of the swamp monster cherry, after his memorable Seventies stint on *Man-Thing*, and it's very much an urban take on the theme.

When a mobster asks him to turn a blind eye to the murder of a fellow police officer, corrupt cop Frank Hoag won't kowtow and is duly riddled with bullets. His dying body is exposed to some mutagenic chemicals, then falls into the sewers. Sewage and chemicals combine to create a near-indestructible blue-black behemoth whose muddled thought-processes manifest as a repeated inability to remember the right word.

Sludge's touch causes human flesh to grow at such a rate that it appears to be melting, usually resulting in his victims' deaths, and his adventures, set firmly in Malibu Comics' "Ultraverse", are a peculiar hybrid of superheroics and gritty horror.

SKY WOLF
THE HEAP RETURNS!
That formless thing of the swamps was once a MAN!.... and one of Germany's greatest fliers. ...but something of incredible fantasy happened... so onto the scene of World War II shambled this hulk of the "LIVING DEATH"!

3 THE HEAP

First appearance: Air Fighters #3 (1942)
Created by: Mort Leav and Harry Stein

The Heap arose from a swamp in Poland, into which German air ace Baron Eric von Emmelmann's biplane plummets after he loses a dogfight with an Allied aviator. Though he lies near death, Emmelmann's will to live is such that his body merges with the swamp vegetation and undergoes an "unearthly transformation", becoming large and shaggy, "a fantastic Heap that is neither animal nor man".

The Heap started out a greyish white in colour but, rather like the Hulk, soon shifted to a more distinctive (and appealing) shade of green. He also became gentler and less monstrous as time went on and reader acclaim for the character grew. His habit of sucking the blood of animals to survive, for instance, fell by the wayside, and soon he was cutting a heroic if melancholy figure, battling gods, aliens and giant octopuses, among other foes.

A second Heap – no relation to the original – slithered through the pages of Skywald's 1970s horror title *Psycho*. This Heap is, like its predecessor, the result of a plane crash, but it's a fusion of pesticides and nerve gas that turns a pilot into monster. And a truly ugly monster he is – a lumbering gelatinous agglomeration of pustules, claws, slime and prehensile tongue who feeds off vermin and garbage and is just too repellent to elicit real sympathy.

2 MAN-THING

First appearance: Savage Tales #1 (1971)
Created by: Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, Gerry Conway and Gray Morrow

From his limpid ruby-red eyes to his carrot-like nose, Man-Thing is a soulful-looking slime beast. He first shambled into existence in the launch issue of black-and-white magazine *Savage Tales*, as one of four back-up tales to the lead *Conan* strip. Scientist Ted Sallis injects himself with a prototype super-soldier formula to prevent its secrets falling into the hands of the bad guys. When his car veers off the road in the Everglades, the muck-laden waters of the swamp interact with the chemicals in his veins and Ted Sallis emerges as the grotesque Man-Thing.

It wasn't until his second appearance (in the Ka-Zar strip in *Astonishing Tales #2*) that Man-Thing acquired his unique ability and the memorable tagline that went with it: "Whatever knows fear burns at the touch of the Man-Thing!" In subsequent stories, writer Steve Gerber took the character to the next level, weaving tales of eco-horror, weird mysticism and mundane tragedy around him and making him sometimes protagonist, sometimes antagonist, and sometimes deus ex machina, a mutely empathetic witness to human folly and personal redemption. The result is quintessential 1970s Marvel: socially aware, striving for relevance, slyly humorous on the side.

1 SWAMP THING

First appearance: House of Secrets #92 (1971)
Created by: Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson

Swamp Thing first lurched into life in a brief, turn-of-the-20th-century revenge melodrama for DC horror anthology *House of Secrets*. So positive was the fan response to the strip that he gained his own comic within a year. His origin remained much the same – scientist altered by a combination of chemicals and mysterious forces within a swamp is resurrected in superhuman-vegetation form – but was updated to a contemporary setting.

Early issues by Wein and Wrightson played up the character's Gothic aspects, portraying him as tortured and misunderstood in the manner of the original Frankenstein monster. It was Alan Moore who delved deepest beneath that root-wreathed hide, however, during his celebrated early-'80s run on *Swamp Thing*. Aided amply by swirling, luxuriant art from Steve Bissette and John Totleben, Moore re-envisioned Swamp Thing as a godlike avatar of the planet's plant life and made him the still centre of a journey through horror tropes – werewolves, zombies, black magic – while at the same time exploring the DC universe's dark underbelly and, in Swamp Thing's romance with girlfriend Abby, depicting a mature, complex relationship that transcends numerous obstacles, not least the species boundary.

> "HE GAINED HIS OWN COMIC WITHIN A YEAR"

"BURN US?" THAT'S NOT VERY FRIENDLY.
THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF TRUTH DOESN'T *DO* FRIENDLY.
WARLOCK? HOW LONG WE GOT?
STAR-PO

Before the movies there were the comics. Dan Abnett tells Stephen Jewell how he made Marvel history with the GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

When *Guardians Of The Galaxy* exploded onto cinema screens, it was almost inconceivable to imagine that the motley band of spacefarers have not always ranked among Marvel Comics' heavy-hitters. But when Dan Abnett and his then-regular writing partner Andy Lanning launched their new incarnation of the interstellar superhero team in May 2008, Star-Lord, Gamora, Drax, Rocket Raccoon and Groot were far from the ubiquitous characters they are today.

"At the time, and traditionally, Marvel's cosmic characters were less popular than the classic and iconic Marvel heroes," says Abnett. "But I had always loved them, so there was a sense of having access to a stockpile of forgotten or half-forgotten low-tier protagonists who were just lying around, with no one caring for them."

With Abnett noting that "one of the takeaways was supposed to be a team-book," *Guardians Of The Galaxy* was a natural extension of his and Lanning's 2007 crossover *Annihilation: Conquest*, which pitted a host of Marvel's cosmic characters – including the future Guardians – against the cybernetic menace of Ultron and the Phalanx. "The line-up of the Guardians grew out of the plot for the event storyline, but it was also a case of cherry-picking the coolest and most interesting D-list characters and trying to make sense of them as a team," explains Abnett. "Though my editors backed me all the way, I could do pretty much what I wanted. I sort of threw them together in ways that seemed to be the most appealing, like putting Rocket with Groot, and then they stole the team name from the original 1969 team, which had an entirely different line-up and was also largely forgotten."

With Nova making a cameo in the first issue, the Guardians' opening roster was crucially not restricted to the current core quintet with the recently revived Adam Warlock, Mantis, Phyla-Vell's Quasar and later Bug also playing prominent roles. "The line-up was fluid, so the team spirit was supposed to be uneasy," Abnett tells *us*. "Both in terms of Marvel's IP and within the fictional setting, these were overlooked characters finding a chance to count in the big scheme of things. Nova already had a book of his own, so he wasn't going to be a part of the team even though he was there to help set it up, a factor nicely allowed for in the movie with the use of the Nova Corps."

Indeed Rocket and Groot didn't start out as best buddies, with the sentient tree taking a diminished role for the first few issues after being seriously injured in *Annihilation: Conquest*. "Inadvertently, that set up the movie concepts of Dancing Groot in the flowerpot, and Baby Groot, which are now very much part of the Guardians mythos," says Abnett, who instead paired Rocket with Cosmo, a telepathic space hound that was inspired by real-life canine astronauts such as Laika, sent into orbit by the Soviets in 1957. "I liked the fact

> **Marvel didn't really see much value in the characters at the time**

that both he and Rocket behaved in very human ways, yet responded to each other in much more amusingly basic animal terms."

Cosmo was the security chief on the inter-dimensional space station Knowhere, a familiar location from the film, which in the comic is located within the severed head of a Celestial. "That was just an idea that was so off the wall," says Abnett. "I'd created Knowhere originally in Nova, and it seemed to suit the needs at the time, which was to set it up and force the reader to think 'but what the heck could cut the head off a Celestial?' It wasn't a question that was ever supposed to be answered, just a concept to increase the sense of wonder, awe and mystery of the Marvel cosmic universe."

Having previously penned series such as *Knights Of Pendragon* for Marvel UK as well as stories like *Judge Dredd* for *2000 AD*, Abnett believes that he had a natural affinity with the Guardians' more offbeat elements. "Those kind of obscure characters have always been favourites of mine, and it just appealed to me creatively, perhaps because I'm British and had grown up with *2000 AD*," he says. "For me, it was less about the classic, all-American superhero and more about science fiction, where the characters, their costumes and powers were rationalised by the sci-fi circumstances. They didn't wear spandex costumes, for example, they wore the clothes, armour and uniforms that were appropriate to the sci-fi cultures around them."

The polar opposite of the Avengers, the individual Guardians don't immediately gel as a group after being brought together through some dubious means by Star-Lord. "They were supposed to be also-rans and losers, and they were meant to be outclassed by the problems they were dealing with," explains Abnett. "The cosmic threats were vast, and these were mavericks and pariahs struggling to fight a good fight, and struggling to find some kind of identity as a team."

LEFT: Drax became a firm fan favourite

TOP-RIGHT: Dog in space: Cosmo, a telepathic space hound

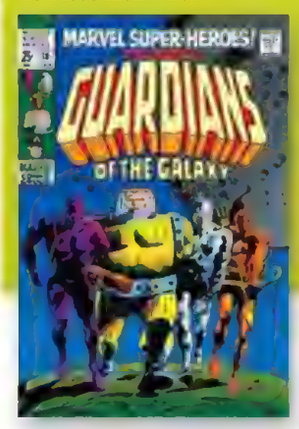
BOTTOM-RIGHT: Groot and Mantis: just two everyday folks

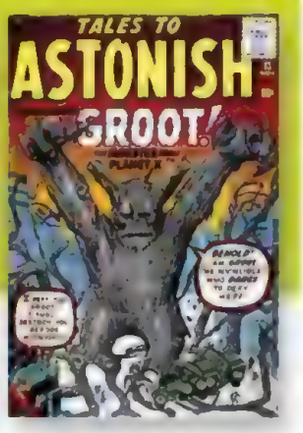
GALACTIC ORIGINS

Charting the Guardians' comic book roots

While Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning are responsible for bringing the current team together in 2008, the Guardians of the Galaxy also owe a huge debt to the work of Jim Starlin. In fact the whole Marvel cosmic universe is inspired by the superheroic space operas that he wrote and drew in the 1970s. Starlin also created Drax the Destroyer and Gamora, who made their respective bows in 1973's *Iron Man* #55 and 1975's *Strange Tales* #180, along with other prominent characters like Thanos and Adam Warlock. "Jim Starlin is one of my favourite creators, and his work on *Warlock* and *Captain Marvel* are benchmarks for me," says Abnett. "It was a pleasure to use those characters and, I hope, honour that legacy."

Star-Lord's first adventure – the work of Steve Englehart and Steve Gan – appeared in 1975's *Marvel Preview* #4 while Rocket Raccoon's inaugural outing, by Bill Mantlo and Keith Giffen, was in *Marvel Preview* #7 the following year. The Stan Lee/ Jack Kirby/ Dick Ayers-created Groot is actually the oldest of the Guardians, dating back to 1960's *Tales To Astonish* #13.





From the Annihilators to the Protectors of the Universe and even the Defenders, numerous other team-names were considered before they eventually settled on the Guardians of the Galaxy. "It was supposed to be a cheeky throwaway," says Abnett. "And the flippant way they stole it was a reminder that they were scoundrels and pirates, who were prepared to beg, borrow and steal to make their way."

SCI-FI HEROES

Debuting in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #18 in 1969, the original Guardians of the Galaxy were created by Arnold Drake and Gene Colan as a hard sci-fi version of a superhero team. But while they were based in the year 3000, future Sentinel of Liberty Vance Astro, the gender-changing Starhawk and the other members of the inaugural outfit also made an appearance after discovering that Star-Lord and his cohorts had audaciously usurped their mantle from a thousand years in the past.

"It was a way to mess with both readers' expectations, and the time stream, and to even riff off Captain America's origin as Vance is found in the ice," reasons Abnett. "I liked the idea that for older, experienced readers, old continuity was kind of suggesting threats coming from all directions in time and space. The book was all about the modern team as such, but I wanted to introduce the idea that the original owners of the team-name might show up and be a bit miffed to find someone else using it."

Time-twisting conundrums were also at the heart of Abnett's 2014 run on *Guardians 3000*, which saw the original Guardians once again taking centre stage. "It was certainly fun to take a proper swing at getting them on their feet after having revived the name for another team," he says. "It was harder work as well, because the originals exist in the future of the Marvel Universe and don't have the same immediate opportunities to bounce off the Marvel Universe characters to establish themselves. I enjoyed creating the future world as they knew it, and then bringing them back to the present day to meet the current team face to face."

Intriguingly, Abnett also theorised in 2015's *Guardians Of Infinity* that the 21st and 30th iterations were not the only Guardians of the Galaxy to have ever existed. "I took the current and future teams, put them back together, and then added a previously unknown

team from the year 1000," he says. "It was as if the Guardians concept was a recurring myth, that every era would have its own team of Guardians when the need arose. Each team had their own spirit: Guardians 1000 – Guardians Millennium – were noble explorers and discoverers, the movie Guardians were out-gunned, rag-tag misfits and rogues, and the Guardians 3000 were heroic freedom fighters."

HELLO HOLLYWOOD

Following the success of films like *Iron Man* and *Avengers*, Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige first hinted in 2010 that, "there are some obscure titles too, like *Guardians Of The Galaxy*," which could successfully make the transition to the big screen. With Abnett and Lanning's stint concluding with #25 in 2010, Brian Michael Bendis helmed a new volume of *Guardians* in early 2012 in anticipation of the movie's release in 2014.

"I was astonished when they secretly told me that the next film in development was *Guardians Of The Galaxy*," admits Abnett. "I get that having done really well with their marque icons, Marvel wanted to see if they could duplicate that magic with unknown characters, and to open up the cosmic side of the cinematic universe to boot, but I was still amazed! I was even more surprised when it was a hit and suddenly the Guardians were famous. I got to visit the set, meet the cast and chat with the director, James Gunn, who made no secret that he was working to the brief of my Guardians."

Claiming that he is "chuffed that the comic I was creating back then has paid off like it has", Abnett is relieved that he was essentially given free rein. "I think that the very fact there were these forgotten characters has paid off," he says. "Marvel really didn't see much value in them at the time, and I got to write what I wanted, and do anything I wanted with them. These weren't high profile properties that Marvel had to keep an eye on, so I could play around and kill characters off and pull big twists. And that's why people liked the comic, because anything might happen next, and that invention provided James Gunn with a very fruitful set of possibilities. It's worth noting that these days, *Guardians Of The Galaxy* is a much harder book to write, as it's important now since it's valuable IP, and Marvel is much stricter at supervising it!"

WELCOME TO BACK HERE, COMRADE QUILL!
HOW WAS BEING FIRST TRIP?
JUST DANDY, COSMO
DO ANYTHING INTERESTING?
SAVED THE UNIVERSE.
OH, NICE FOR YOU.
GRRR... COMRADE RACCOON
MISTER COSMO.
YES, GROOT, OLD BUDDY, OLD TREE. EVEN BETTER THAN "GROOT AND BRANCHES."
QUILL, THIS THING IS AMAZING. IT'S THE MOST EXTRAORDINARILY BALANCED WEAPON.
I'D LOVE TO TEST IT OUT, THROW IT AROUND.
NOT IN HERE, PLEASE. YOU'LL BREAK SOMETHING EXPENSIVE.
LISTEN, ADAM, I--
HE'S WOKEN UP, PETER. I'M GOING TO TALK TO HIM.
HEADS UP, EVERYONE. MANTIS IS TEEPING INTO OUR POOR TIRED BRAINS
OF COURSE. THIS IS GROOT. HE WAS BADLY HURT AND MUCH REDUCED IN STATURE WHILE SAVING OUR LIVES RECENTLY.
BUT HE'S GROWING BACK.
WHAT DID HE SAY?
HE SAID, "I AM GROOT." IT'S PRETTY MUCH ALL HE EVER--
WAIT, THAT'S NOT WHAT HE'S SAYING

X-MEN
DEFEATED BY
DARK
PHOENIX!

Claremont is also a *New York Times* best-selling author

RISE FROM THE ASHES

Chris Claremont talks about the advantage of joining a book in its early years, the women of X-men and his secret origin for Wolverine

Emigrating from the UK to the United States when he was a child, Chris Claremont was made to feel like an outsider, but that would eventually feed his creativity when working on, and effectively saving, the *X-Men* books. During his tenure he penned a number of books that are still, to this day arguably the best in the character's history, and some would go on to be the base for the blockbuster films such as *Days Of Future Past*, *The Dark Phoenix Saga* and his mini-series, *Wolverine*. We caught him as he was sitting down with a cup of tea…

Going into the X-Men book what were your goals?

Basically, to have a really good time. You have to understand this was 1975, we had no expectation that the industry would survive for much longer at that particular point in time. The *X-Men* reboot, when I managed to grab hold of it, gave me the opportunity to work with one of the finest creators and conceptualists in the industry, Dave Cockrum, on some of his best creations. Everything about them was, to use the clichéd phrase, virgin territory. Nothing other than the basics of who they were, what they could do and perhaps where they came from, had been established. So all of the exciting stuff, from a writer's perspective, was just waiting to be played with. It was one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments to grab hold of something at the most unique part of its existence, utterly unlike taking over almost any other major character at Marvel or DC.

Superman had been around for a generation, the Fantastic Four had been around for almost ten years, Spider-Man the same way. All of these characters had a number of writers after their initial progenitors working on the concept, so >

The 2000 movie *X-men* was largely based on Claremont's work

"IT WAS ONE OF THOSE ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME MOMENTS TO GRAB HOLD OF SOMETHING"

there was so much established back-story that it was fun but it wasn't unique. With the X-Men, there was nothing other than Cyclops and Professor Xavier, the uber-concept of the School for Gifted Youngsters and them being mutants, literally feared and hated by the world they are sworn to protect.

What was it like to have such a wide variety of characters to play with?

It meant that everyone always had someone to talk to. The problem with doing a solo book is that, for example, much of Peter Parker's life was spent in monologue, because who is he going to talk to other than himself? The Fantastic Four at least had Reed, Sue and Johnny who could interact. Iron Man could talk to Jarvis, but the beauty for me of a team book was it allowed for the opportunity to play with different perspectives.

You had an African with Storm and Peter Rasputin as Colossus – having a Soviet as part of a superhero team was a radical move in those days. Nightcrawler could have easily have been a clichéd German, full with clichéd German history, except that Dave and I both decided that we didn't want to go with the cliché, we wanted to basically try something completely different. So in a fact he became the rational, moral centre of the team. Of course there was Thunderbird, who was the American, even though he only lasted an issue and a half. And Logan, about nothing more need be said.

There was a remarkable mix of significantly contrasting characters with different attitudes and different origins and different opinions that I found irresistibly fun to play with. And basic attitudes such as how does a young man from a socialist collective deal with living and working in the country that is, for a want of a better term, his country's sworn geopolitical adversary? How does Ororo [Storm] deal with being an outsider, not simply by being a mutant or being a woman, but being African in a non-African society? The whole dichotomy of Logan constantly challenging Nightcrawler to walk down the street without using his image-inducer to hide what he really looks like just to see what would happen. To see if he has trust, if he has faith in his fellow human being, and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. They are very much aware of their position as outsiders and at the same time very much playing against it to achieve a stronger, more positive end.

Before you took over with writing the character, what was your perception of Wolverine?

Well I had no perception, he had just been invented. Before his appearance in *X-Men* he had one appearance in *The Incredible Hulk* and then Len Wein introduced him in *Giant-size X-men #1*. He was what he was. Dave Cockrum's visual perception of him was very much add odds with Len's conception. Len envisioned him as an adolescent, as a 16 or 17-year-old teenager, whereas when we first see him in *Giant-size X-men #1* he is an officer for the Canadian Armed Forces, which to my mind made him a grown-up. And the way Dave drew him totally suggested this is

It's estimated that Claremont has sold 7.5 million comics to date

not a kid, he was a grown man and we went with that. Once we decided he was a grown man we thought, "If he's got a healing factor, how grown-up is he?" We pushed that as far I could get away.

Did you view it (similar to how you viewed the X-men team) as a blank canvas you could work on?

Oh totally. For me the key to Logan has been his past, as far as he is concerned, is done. He doesn't really care about where he has been, he is much more interested in where he is and where he is going. He is always looking ahead, never behind. So that was basically my rational, I never wanted to do an origin for him, because once you've nailed something down as an origin, even if it's the best idea imaginable at the time, come back ten years later and someone may look at it and say "Eugh, that's dumbass".

For me, I wanted it to be a mystery, I wanted every reader to have the opportunity to come up with their own origin for Wolverine and I would just smile politely and say, "OK, if it is good for you go with it. I have a different opinion and I'm going to go with mine, because I am writing the book." For me, the fun of Wolverine is "What happens next?", then as it evolved, the dichotomy between the animal and the man.

In my conception of the character my secret origin of Wolverine is that his father is Sabretooth and his mother is Seraph, the Fallen Angel who runs the Princess Bar in Madripoor, who is a short person, hence Logan's size. He gets his size from his mother, which really pisses Sabretooth off because to him that means Wolverine is flawed. Sabretooth, as far as Sabretooth is concerned, is utter perfection; he is the epitome of whatever he is, he is the best at what he does, which is why every year on Logan's birthday he comes and trys to kill Logan. It's a fair fight, Logan has every opportunity to kill Sabretooth, and he fully expects that some day his kid will kill him, because that's the way of things, >

SUDDENLY...
YOURS WAS AN ADMIRABLE PLOY, STORM. BUT ESCAPING ME WON'T BE THAT EASY.
WHY ARE YOU ATTACKING US?
FOR PITY'S SAKE, JEAN-- WHY?!
ASK NOT FOR PITY FROM DARK PHOENIX, MY LOVE. THERE IS NONE IN HER.
SHE STRIKES LIKE THE ANGEL OF DEATH-- TERRIBLE IN HER UNHUMAN BEAUTY-- AS ELEMENTAL, AS MAJESTIC, AS THE STARS IN THE HEAVENS.

Claremont's storylines saw the team turn against itself at times

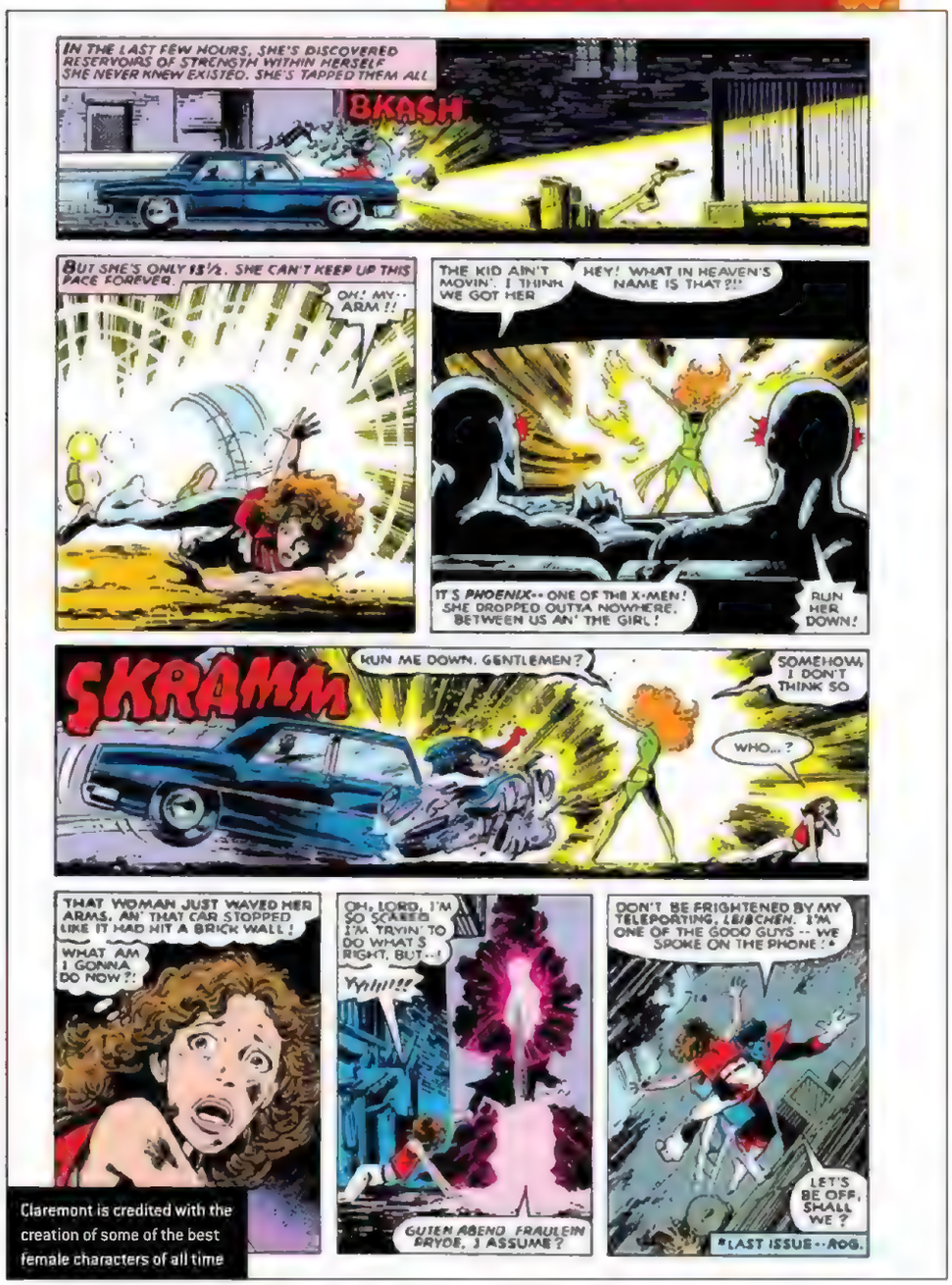
but until he does Sabretooth is going to keep coming every year. Sabretooth is a binary equation – one is or is not. He is the quintessential predator – "I will prey because that is what I do and that is what I am" – and has no regrets whatsoever.

Logan has regrets because of his mother's influence and that's why you have, in my conception of him, the eternal dichotomy of, if you walk in his room, half of it is an utter shitehole and the other half is the quintessential embodiment of minimalist samurai culture. It's just two or three perfect elements: a katana, a table and something else. You look at them, and the harmony of material and space is perfection, and that's his problem. Half of him is one, half is the other, and he wants his life to be the rational, civilised perfection, but the animal keeps clawing him back. It's a never-ending struggle that will probably never be resolved, but that's what makes him so much fun as a character.

Would you say that the core of the X-men isn't saving the world or stopping the bad guy but the relationships between the characters or the team with the outside world?

That should ideally be the centre of any group enterprise. Saving the universe is a day job but what matters is what happens in the off moments, what happens between the costumed adventures, because those are the things that you carry with you for the rest of your lives.

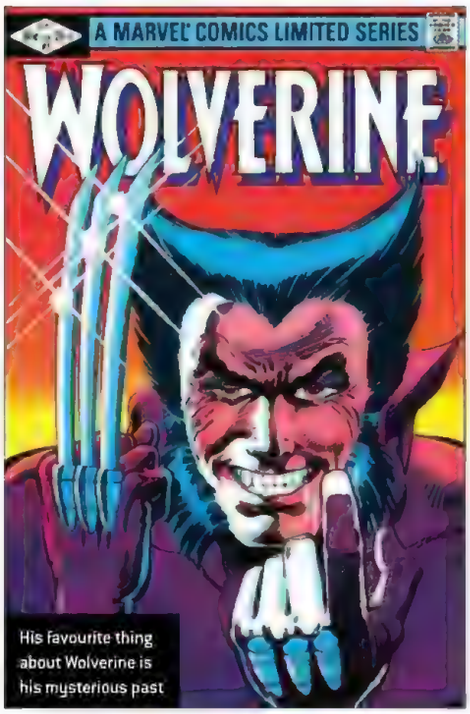
One of the things I always wanted to do and ended up doing in special stories after the fact is to emphasise the X-Men is not a be-all and end-all; it is a point in people's lives. Kitty Pryde comes to the X-Men as a barely-13 year old; at some part down the line she will leave and go to university and get on with the rest of her life. If you read the book on #100 you would see one team of characters; if you came back for #200 maybe you would see the same characters but maybe there would be a new one here or there. If you came back for #300 you'd see Gambit, for example. People would move on. The idea between Scott [Cyclops] and Madeline Pryor was that he was going to meet his true love, Madeline, fall in love, get married and get on with the rest of his life. He'd be available to come back to the team on special events, which would of course be really cool, unique stories, but for the most part he would be doing what real people do, which is you get a job, you raise a family and you ideally live happily ever after.


IN THE LAST FEW HOURS, SHE'S DISCOVERED RESERVOIRS OF STRENGTH WITHIN HERSELF SHE NEVER KNEW EXISTED. SHE'S TAPPED THEM ALL
BKASH
BUT SHE'S ONLY 13½. SHE CAN'T KEEP UP THIS PACE FOREVER.
OH! MY-- ARM!!
THE KID AIN'T MOVIN'. I THINK WE GOT HER
HEY! WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME IS THAT?!
IT'S PHOENIX-- ONE OF THE X-MEN! SHE DROPPED OUTTA NOWHERE, BETWEEN US AN' THE GIRL!
RUN HER DOWN!
SKRAMM
RUN ME DOWN, GENTLEMEN?
SOMEHOW, I DON'T THINK SO
WHO...?
THAT WOMAN JUST WAVED HER ARMS, AN' THAT CAR STOPPED LIKE IT HAD HIT A BRICK WALL!
WHAT AM I GONNA DO NOW?!
OH, LORD, I'M SO SCARED I'M TRYIN' TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT, BUT--!
YYIIIII!!
GUTEN ABEND, FRAULEIN BRYDE. I ASSUME?
DON'T BE FRIGHTENED BY MY TELEPORTING, LIEBCHEN. I'M ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS -- WE SPOKE ON THE PHONE!*
LET'S BE OFF, SHALL WE?
*LAST ISSUE--ROG.
Claremont is credited with the creation of some of the best female characters of all time

My flaw as a writer, as a creator of company-owned stories, is that for certain characters and circumstances I always had endgames. Corporations don't like end games because that deprives them of an exploitable character, so there in lies a primal conflict that the creator does not win. Ever.

Did you have a beginning, middle and end in mind when you started working on X-Men?

I assumed that I would run out of stories at some point but at each point I thought I would, I never did. I figured when I had done it for 15 years, I'll go to 20 and then I'll retire. But I figured if I got to 20 and I was still going strong I could stick around for 25. Unfortunately the company had other ideas because if I'm writing it, they can't offer it to Joss [Whedon] for example. While the fanboy in me understands the rational – "Joss Whedon is very cool, let's give him the X-Men" – I was pissed because I really wanted to play with the ›



characters. And what has he [Joss] ever done anyway?

Marvel or Disney as a company has a different perspective on the properties than someone like me, and I was the anomaly, as most creators, with very rare exception, will only hang around a concept or character for three or four years; they'll end their run and move on or something interesting will catch their eye. With me I just kept coming up with new stuff because it was fun. X-men began New Mutants, which began Excalibur because it was an opportunity to work with brilliant artists, but more importantly it was an opportunity to play with all these cool people I invented and I wanted to find out what happened next.

You introduced arguably the most interesting and memorable female characters in comics. Was that something you wanted to do when taking over the book?

I wanted to tell stories about people who reminded me of people I knew, and I've had the fortune of knowing some really cool people, starting with my Mum. When she was a kid she had a fight with her mum, went out and ended up joining the RAF because she liked the uniform. Only after the fact did she discover that they wouldn't let her fly because women weren't supposed to, men did that, which really pissed her off, so she ended up on a radar station in Dover through the Blitz.

As the story goes she made Sergeant three times and got busted four, which suggested she had a good war. When my parents immigrated my mother ended up getting a pilots licence and she's been a pilot now for the better part of a half-century if not more. But the thing is I have female friends who are war correspondents, I have friends who are part of the council for foreign relations, one of whom is a Pulitzer Prize-winning specialist in Ebola who back in the day if she heard of an outbreak in Africa, would grab her MOPP [Mission Oriented Protective Posture] suit and head for the country to find out what was going on. To know people like that, how could you not try to find ways to create characters to reflect aspects of their lives and their characters just like I would for men?

If for no other reason than for a purely solipsistic visual standpoint, female characters can be a much more enticing visual on the page, but more importantly >

Claremont wrote the storyline whereby Storm beat Cyclops to become the team leader

it gives everybody someone to talk to. Who wants to hang out with a dummy? If one is relating to the teammates, men or women, and they are at the top of their game, then you want to be on the top of your game, too. It not only makes for more interesting conversation; it also makes for more challenging relationships.

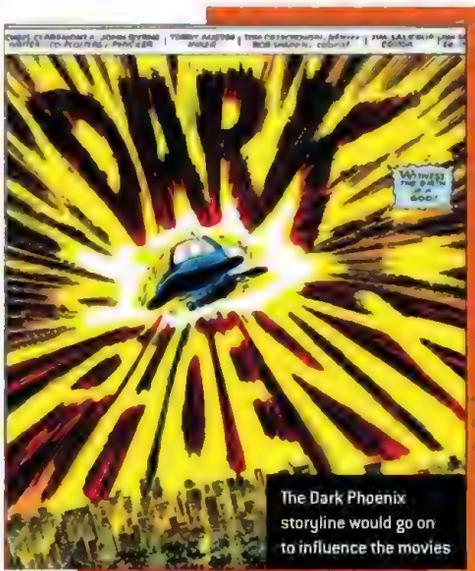
Why do you think there was a lack of interesting female superheroes?

It was probably generational. Stan Lee wrote most of the Marvel material in the early '60s and for him Sue Storm was in a way a ground-breaking character. Sue did as much to be a part of the Fantastic Four team as the guys, it was just that she was the one who ended up needing rescuing more often than not because that was a girl's role in those days.

It evolved with the transition of generations from Stan to Roy Thomas, to Dannis O'Neil to Len Wein, and ultimately to me. We each brought different perceptions of the world around us. There was an evening where a young woman was telling me how passionately she loved the X-men, that these characters were so real to her they were her friends, and her husband was willing to tolerate her indulgence so long as her children were too young to read themselves. But now those kids were old enough to read he felt that comics were inappropriate and so she had to give them up – he told her she had to stop. She was heartbroken because she was... I guess the analogy would be giving up Harry Potter and not knowing how it was going to end because the man you love tells you it's wrong.

I was listening to this and thinking, the solipsistic, egocentric author is going, "Yes! I did it. Score one for me." But the other half is going, "Good God, if I'm writing stories and creating characters that are having this kind of impact then that is my benchmark, I can't do any less than that. I have to up my game every issue just to justify her faith. On one level that is incredibly cool, and on another level it is like, "Holy cow, that's a challenge." On the other hand, when the hell did anyone think of comics in those terms? So it all sort of evolved naturally, and the more it evolved the more challenging it became, but paradoxically, the more fun it became for me.

Perhaps Claremont's most impactful storyline was the Dark Phoenix



The Dark Phoenix storyline would go on to influence the movies

"IT ALSO MAKES FOR MORE CHALLENGING RELATIONSHIPS"

HOW TO... WRITE FOR COMICS

Want to know how the pros got their comic-writing gigs? Then look no further...

By Rob Williams

There's never been a better time to be a comics writer. Okay, sales may have dropped away since the industry's early 1990s heyday, when Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man* #1 sold 2.5 million copies, but every third movie at your local cinema currently seems to be a comic adaptation.

While classic writers such as Alan Moore have rightfully enjoyed more respect in recent years from Britain's literati, other comic scribes are now being snapped up by Hollywood, thanks to the enormous success the likes of *Iron Man* and *The Dark Knight* have enjoyed simply by staying faithful to their sequential source material. And it's not just superheroes – with more leftfield comics such as *The Losers*, *A History of Violence* and *Scott Pilgrim* being made into movies, the door to major success, and fame and fortune, is open to comics professionals. Of course, first you actually have to become a comics professional.

This is not to imply that comics are simply a route towards movies. For many of today's top writers, making comics is the ultimate goal. A childhood dream come true. It's a vibrant, hugely creative area – the chance to meld together visual storytelling and literature in stories – and no other medium mixes that in quite the same way. If you have a visual story to tell, and you don't have a massive budget or the means to hire a CGI-brandishing film crew, then comics are the perfect outlet. Lots of people want to use that medium to tell their tales – but, as with any area of the entertainment industry, there are many more wannabes than there are jobs.

You just have to attend any comic convention and see the endless, patient lines waiting for portfolio reviews to see that a lot of talented people want to work in comics. And they're artists. A visiting comics editor at a convention will actually look at their work to see if they're worth hiring. But if you're a writer, how do you go about getting an editor to read your story? Most major publishers won't look at unsolicited pitches or scripts and won't hire an unpublished writer. So, it's the old catch 22: how do you get published in the first place if no one will publish you? And how do you know what aspects of your writing you should be working on, so you're of a publishable standard in the first place? (Please don't believe the myth that writers are simply born, which implies that talent's all you need, when there are any number of rules, tricks and structures you can learn to make your writing more solid. Writing is a craft. It can and should be worked on over time.)

So, comics may be the land of opportunity for writers, but how do you actually get in? We asked some of comics' top writers – and a few leading editors – these questions and received so much material that we couldn't fit it all into one feature. Part two will follow next issue and then we'll move onto the artists. But for now... You want to be a comics writer? Start reading.

COMIC HEROES

ROGUES' GALLERY

Say hello to the comic pros who share their wisdom in this feature...

1. Rob Williams
Rob Williams wrote this article. He's also the writer behind the new *Robo-Cop* series, *Indiana Jones and the Tomb of the Gods*, *Cla$$war*, various *Star Wars* comics and, ooh, loads more.

2. Tony Lee
Tony Lee has written *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* for Marvel, and is writing the ongoing *Doctor Who* series for IDW.

3. Simon Spurrier
Simon (Si) Spurrier is the regular writer of Bleedingcool.com's oh-so-vaguely-comics-related column 'Short 'n Curlies'. He's written *Silver Surfer* and *X-Men* titles for Marvel, *Batman* for DC, *Judge Dredd* for *2000 AD*.

4. Al Ewing
Al Ewing is a regular writer for *2000 AD* and the *Judge Dredd Megazine*, currently writing *Judge Dredd*, *Zombo*, *Damnation Station* and *Tempest*. Ewing has also written short *Hulk* and *Iron Man* pieces for Panini, as well as three pulp novels for Abaddon Books.

5. David Hine
David Hine is a British comic book writer and occasional artist. His major creator-owned work is *Strange Embrace* from Active Images and Image Comics. He's currently working on *Spider-Man Noir* for Marvel, *Detective Comics* for DC, *FVZA* and *Ryder on the Storm* for Radical, *Poison Candy* for Tokyopop and *Elephantmen* for Richard Starkings. Hine also writes *The Bulletproof Coffin*, co-created by artist Shaky Kane, which will be published later this year by Image Comics.

6. Antony Johnston
Antony Johnston is the writer of *Dead Space*, *Wolverine: Prodigal Son* and the *Alex Rider* graphic novels, and creator of *Wasteland*. Antony is currently writing *Daredevil* and *Cold City*.

7. Kieron Gillen
Kieron Gillen came to wider attention with his pop music urban-fantasy comic *Phonogram* for Image Comics. His work for Marvel includes *Thor*, *Dark Avengers: Ares* and *SWORD*. He's currently working on the forthcoming *The Heat*, a Mercury-based science-fiction police action comic.

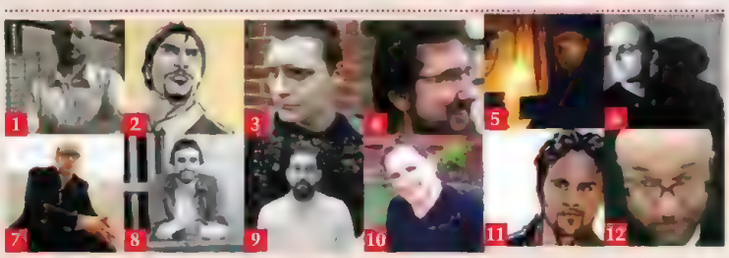
8. Jeff Mariotte
Jeff Mariotte is an award-winning novelist and comic book writer whose comic titles include *Desperadoes*, *Garrison*, *Fade to Black*, *Zombie Cop*, *Barack Obama: The Comic Book Biography* and many more.

9. Joseph Rybandt
Joseph Rybandt works for publisher Dynamite Entertainment.

10. Matt Smith
Matt Smith is the editor of the multi-award-winning *2000 AD* and the *Judge Dredd Megazine*, and has been The Mighty Tharg's representative on Earth for over a decade.

11. Chris Ryall
Chris Ryall is the publisher and editor-in-chief of IDW Publishing.

12. Dan Abnett
Dan Abnett has written extensively for *2000 AD*. He's currently writing cosmic superhero books for Marvel, including *Nova* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and has just finished a 16-month run on *The Authority* for Wildstorm. Abnett is also the author of 36 novels, including *Triumff* and the bestselling *Gaunt's Ghosts* series.



Also starring!

Andy Diggle, ex-editor of *2000 AD* and writer of *The Losers*, *Hellblazer* and more!
Joshua Ortega, currently penning Wildstorm's *Gears of War*!
Randy Stradley, writer and VP of Dark Horse Comics!

Antony Johnston image © Charlie Chu/Dan Abnett image © Adelic High

Q HOW DID YOU GET YOUR 'BREAK' IN THE COMICS INDUSTRY AND HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO FINALLY GET PUBLISHED?

In which we learn the disparate routes into the industry, which will hopefully provide those starting out with a few ideas.

Al Ewing (Judge Dredd, 2000 AD):
I saw the submissions guidelines in *2000 AD* and sent off a 'Terror Tale' – a five-page twist-ending horror story, cousin to the famous 'Future Shocks' format. A few months later, I sent off another, which was rejected, but got Tharg (*2000 AD*'s 'alien' editor) to take a closer look at the first. He suggested some reworking and gave me a couple of tips on how to write, and I managed to get the second draft accepted, so I was published about a year or so after I started trying. That wasn't the opening of a magical door, though – it never is. It took another year of rejections to get published again and I got an awful lot of small press work under my belt before I was getting any kind of regular gigs in *2000 AD*.

Above: *Judge Dredd* and *2000 AD* have been a breeding ground for British comics talent

below: Itching to write a *Ghost Rider* story? Si Spurrier did. Who knows, maybe one day you'll get your chance, too...

Si Spurrier (Silver Surfer, Ghost Rider):
"I'm a bit anti the whole notion of A Big Break. I worry that it's a really unhelpful impression – one which I think a lot of would-be comics writers cling to – that there's this One Significant Hurdle, and as soon as you're over it you've got your »

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TOP: Tony Lee writes for *Doctor Who*. We're very jealous

ABOVE LEFT: More *Doctor Who*, of the David Tennant variety.

LEFT: Antony Johnston is currently writing *Daredevil*

foot in the door and it's an easy ride to fame and fortune. It just doesn't work like that, sadly. There are hurdles every step of the way and the second one is just as high as the first. Higher, sometimes. I know a lot of guys who've landed one gig and then can't understand why the second one doesn't automatically follow.

Tony Lee (Doctor Who, X-Men):
The funniest thing with most people's stories about how they 'broke' into the industry is that a lot of them sound like the person was an overnight success even when they weren't. For example, my first published story was an 11-page strip in a Marvel comic, *X-Men Unlimited* #1. People were shocked – the fact that this unpublished comics writer had a Marvel comic on his first bat out was almost unheard of. But I was published by Marvel when I was 34. I've been a professional writer and journalist for over 20 years now. I worked for pretty much everything, from Radio 4 to TV, newspapers to trade papers to magazines to commercial radio adverts. If I hadn't had 16 years of solid writing experience that I could show the editors, there was no way that I could have got that initial meeting.

Andy Diggle (The Losers, Daredevil):
I took a fairly unconventional route into the industry, by getting a job in editorial before I became a writer. I was gearing up to start bombarding *2000 AD* with story ideas when I heard they were looking for an editorial assistant. I got the job and spent four years moving up through the ranks there before I finally jumped ship. I'd never had any ambition to be an editor, but it was fantastic training for a would-be writer – seeing how comics get put together from the inside. Apart from a couple of anonymous Tharg stories, my first published comics work was *Lenny Zero* in the *Megazine*, with art by Jock.

Dan Abnett (The Authority, Nova):
My first published comic work was on junior and nursery licensed comic properties at Marvel UK in the late 1980s. I was an editorial assistant and a lot of work like that was farmed out in-house. We're talking the likes of *Care Bears* and *Ghostbusters*. Once I had the confidence, »

© Image Comics

I started to pitch ideas to editors at Marvel US in New York and I also went freelance so I could concentrate on the writing.

David Hine (Detective Comics, X-Men):
I began by self-publishing when I was at art college. I wrote and drew a magazine called *Primal Scream*, with a few contributions from friends, and used the art college printing press to produce the printed copies. I even made the photographic plates and operated the printing press myself, cropped and cable-stitched the finished copies and then distributed it. A lot of effort was involved but it gave me a good all-round experience of the process. It took a couple of years after leaving college to get my first strips published in underground comic *Knockabout* and then *2000 AD*. I did a lot of bread-and-butter inking work for Marvel UK as well.

ABOVE: Si Spurrier's *Gutsville* is a highly original comic. Read it if you can

BELOW: Rob Williams wrote postmodern superhero tale *Cla$$war* for the publisher Com.x

Antony Johnston (Daredevil, Wasteland):
If you date it from when I made my first formal submission to a publisher, then it's about three years. But even that didn't happen until I'd spent maybe a year figuring out what to pitch. My first 'break' was *Frightening Curves*, which was an illustrated novel, not a comic *per se*. It started out as a web thing, then got picked up by a small indie publisher who also did comics, so after *FC*, my first graphic novel was for the same people. That early work was enough to get me a calling card with other, larger indies. Getting some early encouragement and endorsement from Warren Ellis sure didn't hurt.

Jeff Mariotte (Wildcats, Desperadoes):
I was managing a bookstore and hired Jim Lee's wife). She became my assistant manager and I got to know the family, and they read some of my published work (which at the time consisted of short fiction and journalism). After the company that owned my store shut it down, Jim asked me to work for him as a writer, working initially on what would be the first set of *WildCats* trading cards. I kept bugging people until I got the chance to script a *Union* issue, then a *Gen13* issue. My first original comic story was a Warblade back-up in *WildCats* #9, with art by Travis Charest.

Keiron Gillen (Thor, Phonogram):
My first professional gig in comics was actually for Games Workshop when it was doing its *Warhammer Monthly* comic. But in terms of a real break, we're talking about *Phonogram*. For the first half of the 00s, I'd been doing small press work, webcomics and an editorial cartoon with Jamie McKelvie ('Save Point' for *Official Playstation 2* magazine). He'd just done a book with Eric Stephenson, Image's Executive Director, now Publisher. Image knew we were working on something, and asked us to pitch. They said yes.

Joshua Ortega (Gears of War, Battlestar Galactica):
My break came from writing and publishing my first novel, *Frequencies*. I was able to do a 40-city book tour for the novel, and that really helped to establish my name and expose people to the work. From there, I had some talks with DC, then met with Top Cow, Dark Horse and Marvel, and Marvel ended up being the first comics publisher to put my work out there (though it's worth noting that DC *did* pay me for some unpublished work). The first published book was *Spider-Man Unlimited* #8, which, ironically, was Joe Hill's first published comic work.

top: *2000 AD* still remains the most vital of British comics

top right: More artwork from Rob Williams' *Cla$$war*

middle: Dirty Frank is another Williams creation for *2000 AD*

Q YOU'RE AN UNPUBLISHED WRITER WITH YOUR PITCH/STORY IN HAND AND YOU ATTEND YOUR FIRST COMIC CONVENTION. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO TO GET AN EDITOR TO READ IT?

In which we deal with the important, and unwritten, protocols of getting your properly formatted, spellchecked and, crucially, grammatically correct document in front of the person who may actually hire you – the editor.

Al Ewing: Walk away – and show your pitch to the small press people instead. The fact is that an editor will be much more likely to take you seriously if they have some sort of evidence that you can write. Seeing a finished, lettered, printed comics page will give them an idea of what you're made of, and give you an idea of what needs improving in yourself. And, fortunately, in this country we have a thriving small press scene – you can find an editor willing to publish you in a small press anthology without too much bother, or you can self-publish on a photocopier. Once you've got a few of those under your belt, you'll be infinitely better and stronger as a writer.

Si Spurrier: Just introduce yourself to the editor – nothing more. Don't be sleazy, don't be desperate, don't be a cliché and, above all else, don't give them the pitch. It won't be read. Seriously, put it away. Don't even get it out in the first place. If you're a wannabe writer and your aim is to get into comics by waving sheets of paper in editors' faces, you're already pretty much fucked. The worst you can hope for is that they tell you to pitch it verbally, then and there, on the spot. This – unless you're prepared – is guaranteed to turn you into a gibbering idiot and to reduce your glorious story idea into a stammerfest of uselessness, which is kind of what the editor expects. And secretly enjoys. No, best practice is this: Introduce yourself. Tell them you're a writer with an idea and you're confident they're going to love it. (And that had better be true, by the way, or you're fucked again.) Ask if it's cool for you to post or email them your idea, when the craziness of the convention is all over and done with.

Tony Lee: Sell yourself, not your work. If an editor meets you and gets to know you, your name will be more recognisable to them when they see it. They will have a bond with you now that will help you get feedback, be it positive or negative. It'll be easier to speak to them by email, ask for advice and discuss what stories they're actually looking for – that way you can tailor future pitches to their needs. So my suggestions are, firstly, never hassle them on their time off (for instance, at the bar) unless you're buying them a drink – and even then, don't talk shop. When you do introduce yourself at a convention, ask if they have any free time to speak to you over the weekend. *Do not mention the script.* You want this to be a long-term professional relationship. Never argue with them if they shoot your idea down and only give them the proposal if they ask. »

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ABOVE: Antony Johnston penned the script for the game and comic of *Dead Space: Extraction*

ABOVE RIGHT: *The Simping Detective*, by Si Spurrier

RIGHT: Dan Abnett's *Sinister Dexter*

Andy Diggle: Never, ever pitch stories to editors at conventions. It's the wrong venue for it. Introduce yourself, by all means, so they can put a face to your name, but don't pitch them there and then. Put it in writing.

Dan Abnett: Be polite. Be as professional as you can. Have copies of your pitch or samples of your work in neat, clean multiples that you can hand out and leave with people (clearly tagged with your contact details). Don't give anybody too much – don't expect someone to read, on spec, your 880-page graphic novel script. If possible, know your target – don't try to give samples or pitches to an editor or company that has stated it's not soliciting. Similarly, if a company has published submission guidelines, read them and, you know, *stick to them*.

David Hine: The only answer is to get it drawn and lettered. I don't know of any editors who will look at scripts or even pitches from unpublished writers unless they can see how they work with an artist. No editor will wade through a fat script by an unknown writer. If you know someone who can draw, then get them to draw up at least a few scenes and ideally produce an entire comic book. These days, you can easily run off a dozen copies on a home printer to hand out to editors. Even if you don't know an artist personally, it's not hard to track people down on the internet. Artists need scripts to work from and if you're good then an unpublished artist will benefit from interpreting your story. After all, that's how Dave McKean and Neil Gaiman started out.

BELOW: David Hine wrote the manga *Poison Candy*

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Antony Johnston: Don't do it. Maybe ten years ago it might have worked, but these days editors barely have time to read all the pitches they receive from professional writers, let alone newcomers. Editors want to see finished comics from unpublished writers, not pitches. It doesn't have to be huge, or expensive; a ten-page short published on the web will give anyone a good idea of whether or not you can write. Think of it like a band's demo CD.

Jeff Mariotte: You should put it away. It's okay, at a convention, to talk to editors and let them know what you've written (verbally). You can even buy an editor a drink at the hotel bar later in the day. But if you put a piece of paper with words on it in front of an editor at a con and ask him or her to read it, you're making a mistake. If you leave it with an editor, chances are it'll never make it out of the room. The best thing to do? Ask if you can send something in after the editor is back in the office and away from the frenetic paces of the convention floor. Get a business card! And then follow up.

Keiron Gillen: If you're pitching cold, with no reputation… well, you may as well play the lottery. If you're pitching company-owned characters, then it's particularly hard. Even with a brilliant pitch, the status quo you're pitching for may not exist by the time they could even consider publishing it. About your only hope is that the editor is already, in some way, interested in your work – in which case, you need to get on the scene and make yourself known. Don't worry about pitching at the con. Just go to meet people, hang out, have a few drinks and don't be a dick. Especially at British cons, where there's a tradition of everyone drinking in the same place and fewer boundaries between creator and the public, this is easy to do. The sort of people who like to weaponise any form of human interaction call this 'networking'. I just call it being social. My advice would be: don't be a writer pitching. Find an artist and pitch with them.

Joshua Ortega: Get published elsewhere. Have a body of work to back up your writing. The 'humorous' side of me can't avoid these four handy tips: 1) Be male; 2) Be white; 3) Be over 40, or at least over 30; 4) Be a former editor or current publisher. »

HOW IMPORTANT IS STRUCTURE (FOR EXAMPLE, PLOT ARCS) IN YOUR WRITING?

Where we concentrate on a writing tip... you know, the important stuff... Here, it's the fact that your story shouldn't be a rambling train of thought, no matter how brilliant you believe it to be. A story needs solid structural foundations.

Al Ewing: I'm pretty terrible at the three-act structure, but I have certain iron rules. I try very hard not to have a scene change in the middle of a page, and I do my best to end pages on a high note and give the reader a reason to keep reading. Occasionally I'll play games with the format and that needs a certain structural awareness. And if there's a gun in act one, it has to be fired by act three. Or rather, if you're going to have a gun fire in act three, make sure it's set up in act one or you've got a *deus ex machina*.

ABOVE: More *Gutsville* it's set in the belly of a whale Fact!

RIGHT: Kieron Gillen's *SWORD* stars members of the X Men

LEFT: Dan Abnett's *Guardians of the Galaxy* for Marvel

RIGHT: Rob Williams' *Indiana Jones* comic for Dark Horse

Tony Lee: It's the deal-breaker. With a novel you can just start hammering out words and eventually you're done, but with a comic you don't have that luxury. You need to ensure that your right-hand page-turns pop, that your scenes change at a logical point, that your cliffhangers are perfectly timed to hit every 22 pages or so, and that you know how the story ends before you start scripting it. I start a story and I write a synopsis. I then bullet-point the main parts and block that into the amount of issues. I then take each issue and block it out into 22 pages, each with a line of description. Only then do I start scripting. When you're a writer, the script part of the story should be the quickest and easiest, because all of the leg-work has been done.

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Andy Diggle: The page is structure. The issue is structure. The arc is structure. [It] just means, 'beginning, middle, end'.

Dan Abnett: It's very important, though it depends on the project. Some of my *2000 AD* strips have very strong verbal structures in them – repetitions and variations, and so on. Sometimes I work with an artist to get visual structures in place: particular types of panel shapes or size and particular views.

David Hine: The structure of your story is imperative: there's Setup, Confrontation and Resolution. After that there are all kinds of complexities. As a rule, though, you should know how a story begins and how it ends before you do anything else. That sounds obvious but there are a lot of comics out there that are no more than a lot of 'cool' ideas strung together with no real direction. I always plot out a series in lot of detail and I'll have worked out most of the key scenes for every issue before I start on issue one. When I write an issue, I create a detailed plot breakdown, then decide where the page breaks are. There's nothing worse than getting to page 20 and realising you're only halfway through your story. If the structure is strong, then all the other problems will solve themselves. The characters will evolve.

Antony Johnston: Structure is everything, but that's because I can't write without an outline, and if I have to choose one over the other, I'll always take plot over character. But that's just me. There are many very successful writers (and happy readers) out there of the opposite opinion, and that's the beauty of fiction.

Jeff Mariotte: It's possible to have plot without structure. It's possible to have a random sequence of events, too, that don't lead anywhere. Neither one is going to make for satisfying reading.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO ANY HIRING TRANSACTION: THE PERSON WHO WANTS THE JOB AND THE PERSON CAPABLE OF GIVING IT (OR OF INFORMING THEM THAT THEIR GIANT-WARRIOR-ANT MAXI-SERIES ISN'T QUITE WHAT THE MARKET IS CURRENTLY LOOKING FOR). SINCE MUCH OF THIS FEATURE IS ABOUT HOW YOU GO ABOUT GETTING A JOB FROM A COMICS EDITOR, WE THOUGHT IT'D BE INTERESTING TO GO STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE: WHAT DO THEY WANT?

Q Do you hire unpublished people? Is it a case of a writer getting their work published elsewhere first?

Randy Stradley, Dark Horse Comics: Since the majority of what I'm editing right now is *Star Wars*, I'm wary of hiring writers who've not yet been published. There's so much about writing comics well that's specific to comics, it's not really possible to tell from a prose outline if a writer understands how to script comics. Still, I have hired a couple of first-timers – but always for short jobs first and usually after extensive discussions with them to get an idea of how they think about comics.

Matt Smith, The Mighty Tharg! 2000 AD: Very rarely do I hire people who haven't had work published elsewhere. Al Ewing's first 'Terror Tale' for *2000 AD*, 'Scene of the Crime', was published in 2002 and is a singular case of a script being plucked from the submissions pile, but that's unusual. Usually, writers who get their first work for Tharg come with a background of having worked for other publishers, whether it's in professional comics, journalism or the small press.

Chris Ryall, IDW Publishing: We do publish unpublished people, but it's an admittedly rare and difficult thing for new writers to accomplish. The primary reason for this is that we're of a size where we can make some licensed books work with writers that don't have a long, established track record, but we're not able to 'break' new talent in most cases. And as a publisher competing with Marvel and DC for shelf space, our books really do benefit from the formula of 'licensed title plus familiar creator'. So it does benefit writers to get published by smaller publishers and then work their way up.

Q Artists can put their work in front of an editor and make an immediate impression. What does a writer have to do?

Randy Stradley: Demonstrate that they know the story they're telling. Sum it up completely, yet concisely. I want to assimilate it as quickly as possible. Give me a short synopsis to give me a taste, then a longer outline to flesh out the characters and story. If my first exposure to your story is a ten-page outline or a 30-page script, I'm probably going to drag my feet getting to your samples.

Matt Smith: It can be harder for writers to grab the attention, but putting your script submission in an embossed folder, printed out on laminated pages, doesn't make a blind bit of difference. I'd much rather see a clearly laid out script, and a short and snappy synopsis. In fact, knowing how to lay out a comic script goes a long way towards keeping my attention.

Joseph Rybant: Writers come to us in a variety of ways: they pitch a property we're working on and have a great take, or they're working on other books and we like the work they're doing there, or we have a relationship in some other form.

Chris Ryall: Show us published work, which does two things: it shows that someone else thought enough of their work to publish it and it also gives us a sample that can be more quickly read than a full script from a new writer.

Q What's the main thing that you look for in a pitch? And how quickly can you tell if someone's work is of a publishable quality?

Randy Stradley: I ask that each story/series proposal begins with one or two sentences about each of the following: Plot, Story and Theme. I want to know that the writer understands the difference between the three. The Plot covers the mechanics of what happens – the framework for all of the action. The Story is why what happens in the Plot matters to the characters (and, by extension, to the readers) and how the characters' motivations and desires drive the action of the Plot. And finally, Theme is the point of the story – what the writer is trying say about life, the human condition and so on, with the characters.

Matt Smith: An original and interesting idea is the first thing that grabs you. Something that's initially easy to get your head around but with depth and potential. It's often said that the most enduring *2000 AD* characters can be summed up in a sentence: Judge Dredd – future cop; Strontium Dog – mutant bounty hunter; Rogue Trooper – clone soldier out for revenge; Nemesis the Warlock – alien freedom fighter. If you have to spend a paragraph explaining why the protagonist does what he does, then maybe it's too convoluted. You can tell quite quickly if someone can write – you're looking for a voice, something that's unique to the writer.

Joseph Rybant: When we're working up a property, we have a general idea of our tone and approach, though we always move one way or the other depending on the creative party brought in (writer or artist). Sometimes we ask a writer to pitch cold, not giving them any direction one way or the other, and what we're looking for there is to see if the writer has a strong gasp of the concepts and the voice of the characters... and a good story to get us out there for four or five issues.

Chris Ryall: I look for someone with the ability to communicate the story in a concise manner. As hard as it is to find the time to read new pitches at all, the chances of one being read is dependent on it being short. I think this is a common misconception with new writers, who often feel the need to put everything into an initial pitch.

On the contrary, the opposite is true. You want to hook me with your proposal – and you want to make me want to see more. If you can get an editor asking you a follow-up question after they read your proposal – "I'd love to see more, what comes next?" or something – you're that much further along to it actually getting accepted. As to how you can tell if someone is of publishable quality, it's just that ability to convey a story with a page or two at the most that gives me an initial sign of a person's storytelling ability. If they can make me care about a situation, character or storyline in a page, that shows me a lot.

THE PITCH

WANT TO KNOW HOW TO PITCH YOUR STORY TO A PUBLISHER? HERE, **KIERON GILLEN** KINDLY PROVIDES US WITH HIS PITCH TO IMAGE FOR HIS AND ARTIST **JAMIE MCKELVIE**'S SERIES ***PHONOGRAM***...

PHONOGRAM
RUE BRITANNIA
Gillen/McKelvie

"Oh England, my love, you made me look a fool."–
'All My Life', Blur

CONCEPT: Music is Magic. You know this already. You've known this from the first time a record sent a divine shiver down your spine or when a band changed the way you dressed forever. How does something that's just noises arranged in sequence do that? No-one knows. It's just... magic.

Everyone knows that. It's just that some realise that it's more than metaphor. These people, called Phonomancers, use the magical energy of pop music to attempt to satisfy their desires. *Phonogram* describes the drama, conflict and intrigue when these desires diametrically oppose. *Rue Britannia* charts the battle to define the communal memory of the early-nineties guitar-music renaissance known as Britpop. It's fought between a group of Retromancers, who wish to gain eternal youth through entering a streamlined history into nostalgia culture, and a Phonomancer called David Kohl, who needs to keep it true to what really happened to keep his very identity. *Phonogram: Rue Britannia* is a dark urban-fantasy comic. For a movie style high-concept, in terms of approach, imagine *Hellblazer* meets *Blue Monday*.

FORMAT: Six 22-page black-and-white chapters or 'singles'. Each is designed to mimic one of the records cited in the plot. Ideally, we'd also like two pages of supplementary material. One is an editorial page, including communiqes from the creators, bonus material about the period and letters. The second is a one-page 'B-side' comic, which hits another part of the *Phonogram* mythos.

THE CAST

DAVID KOHL: A tall, thin shadow with emo glasses. He became a Phonomancer a decade ago, baptised during the guitar-band revival known as Britpop. His abilities are still rooted there, but he moves in less populist circles as a member of an underground coven of mages. If you asked him about Britpop now, he'd dismiss it with a sneer before abusing his powers to try and seduce your younger sister. He's a bitter, cynical, disagreeable figure with only a little charisma to hold even residual affection. *Rue Britannia* is the story of him realising the importance of his history, making peace with it and realising what he has to do to make amends.
Favourite music: Whatever you haven't heard. Mostly, what he hasn't heard either.

EMILY ASTER: Phonomancer, Kohl's long-time confidant and theoretical coven superior. In *Scooby-Doo* terms, ten years ago she was a self-mutilating Thelma. Now, through an act of will, she's more like Daphne. She dresses in a club-style with dyed hair in an asymmetrical cut. She's bitchy, playful and piercingly intelligent.
Favourite music: Miss Kittin, Dizzee Rascal, Shystie, MIA.

KID-WITH-KNIFE: David Kohl's friend. Utterly non-magical and only vaguely aware of what David does. Tall and athletic, he moves like a soldier but dresses in street-style hoodies. Not as mercurially brilliant as the rest of the cast, but painfully loyal. Called on by Kohl when more physical abilities are required.
Favourite music: Old-skool hip-hop or jungle. Failing that, anything danceable.

BETH: Then: Obsessive fan of pretentious punk-pop band Manic Street Preachers. Now: Mid-twenties housewife who has disowned her past and has long since lost her dreams. One of Kohl's sorta-exes, in that they had a will-they-won't-they affair which was never consummated. However, Kid-With-Knife had a one night stand. Favourite music: Then: THE MANICS!!!! Now: Nothing.

INDIE DAVE: Imagine Gollum going to a Belle and Sebastian gig. That's Indie Dave. A pallid, chest-sunken man with lank hair and bulbous eyes, dressed only in a pair of jeans. He lives the life of a recluse in a North Yorkshire bedsit. An expert in magic based on memory and a member of the same coven as Kohl.
Favourite music: No favourite music, just stuff that lessens the pain. Momentarily.

THE MYTH: An enormous bear-like man with sad eyes, this legendary Phonomancer is the head of Kohl's coven and has been a mage since punk's year-zero. Was a member of the largest Phonomancer cabal ('The Adversary'), but left to form his own out of disgust at its direction.
Favourite music: Underground indie, Pastels, Sonic Youth, Dexys, riot grrl.

BRITANNIA: Aspect of the Feminine Principle, first active in the 1960s. As prophesied, returned triumphant as Britpop started, before dying at its close.

RETROMANCERS: Term used to describe any mage who gains energy through tapping appreciation of old music. The events of *Rue Britannia* are caused by a group of Retromancers who are attempting to gain control of the Britpop period by stealing Britannia's corpse and using it to redefine everyone's communal memory.

YEAH I KNOW I'M NOT A PHONY PHONWHATEVER KOHL IS
BUT I SAID I WOULD MAN TEACH ME SOMETHING I WANNA HAVE A CRACK
HI DAVE
STICK IT ON AND TURN IT UP
CLOSE YOUR EYES AND LISTEN HARD FOCUS JUST FEEL THE SOUND LET IT SWEEP OVER YOU
AND WHEN YOU CAN FEEL IT FILLING EVERY SINGLE CELL IN YOUR BODY
JUST RIDE IT AS LONG AS YOU CAN
SOMETIMES LIKE THAT AHMAN
AND I'M JUST ASSUMING YOU KNOW?
THAT'S MAGIC
WELL

THE SCRIPT

IT'S ALL WELL AND GOOD TO HAVE AN IDEA OF YOUR STORY AND TO GET IT ALL DOWN IN A PITCH, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO ACTUALLY WRITING THE COMIC, WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? **ANTONY JOHNSTON** SHOWS US WITH A PAGE OF SCRIPT FROM ISSUE 24 OF HIS SERIES **WASTELAND**, WITH ART BY **CHRISTOPHER MITTEN**.

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SMAK!
YOU... YOU BROKE YOUR CHAINS? JUST LIKE THAT?
JUST LIKE THAT. SHUT UP AND STAY STILL.
BLAM!
THAT KID WITH ALL THE SCARS...
YEAH. LET'S GO.

PANEL 1

As the guard drops to his knees, clutching his throat and trying to get his breath back, Michael picks up the rifle from where it fell...

DOG TRIBE MEMBER 2
Kof *Kof*

PANEL 2

...Then SMACKS the guard in the head with the rifle butt.

SFX
Smak!

PANEL 3

The guard is out cold. Michael turns to Abi and Gerr. Gerr is gobsmacked.

GERR
You... you broke your chains? Just like that?

MICHAEL
Just like that. Shut up and stay still.

PANEL 4

CLOSE ON Abi and Gerr's chained wrists, as Michael holds the rifle barrel against Abi's chains and SHOOTS to break them.

SFX
Blam!

PANEL 5

Abi and Gerr stand up, rubbing their sore wrists. Abi looks off, in the direction Kilian went. But Michael knows there's no time to waste.

ABI
That kid with all the scars...

MICHAEL
Yeah. Let's go.

SFX

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE SCI-FI AND FANTASY MAGAZINE

SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING EXCLUSIVE!
Marvel boss Kevin Feige with the lowdown on the Wall-Crawler's comeback
SFX
No.1 SCI-FI
NEW SEASON EXCLUSIVE!
GAME OF THRONES
WINTER HAS COME!
On set with the stars for the beginning of the end...
PLUS!
WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES
WE VISIT THE FRONTLINE
AND... MIDNIGHT, TEXAS · OKJA · FEAR THE WALKING DEAD · THE STRAIN · KILLJOYS · THE WAR OF THE WORLDS · JURASS
WONDER WOMAN EXCLUSIVE
CAN SHE SAVE THE DC MOVIE UNIVERSE?
SFX
BLADE RUNNER 2049
49
THE BEST MOVIE & TV ACTION!
TRANSFORMERS 5
THE MUMMY
ALIEN

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COMICS WE RATE

The next 12 pages are crammed with reviews of the latest comics and graphic novels...

108 Guardians of the Galaxy: Mission Breakout
108 Luke Cage
108 Cable
108 Secret Empire
108 Jean Grey
110 Trinity #9
110 Batman #24
110 Bane Conquest
110 Scooby Apocalypse
110 Captain Atom
112 Hellboy: Into The Silent Sea
113 The Death Of Stalin
113 Judge Dredd
114 Lawless: Welcome To Badrock
114 The Adventures Of John Black
115 Star Wars: Doctor Aphra
115 Slaine: The Brutania Chronicles
116 Kirby King of Comics
116 Dredd/Anderson: The Deep End
116 Summer Magic
117 One-Eyed Jack
117 Ravina The Witch?
118 Thrill-Power Overload
118 The Spectacular Sisterhood of Superwomen
119 2000AD Prog 2030
119 Tekken

RATINGS EXPLAINED

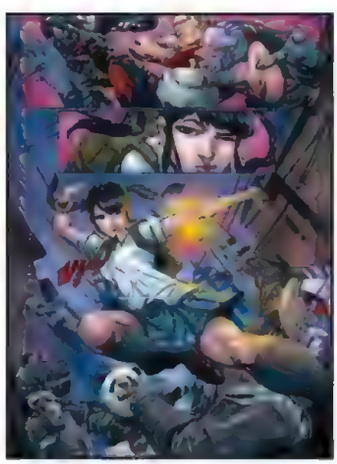
★★★★★ SPACE MARINES

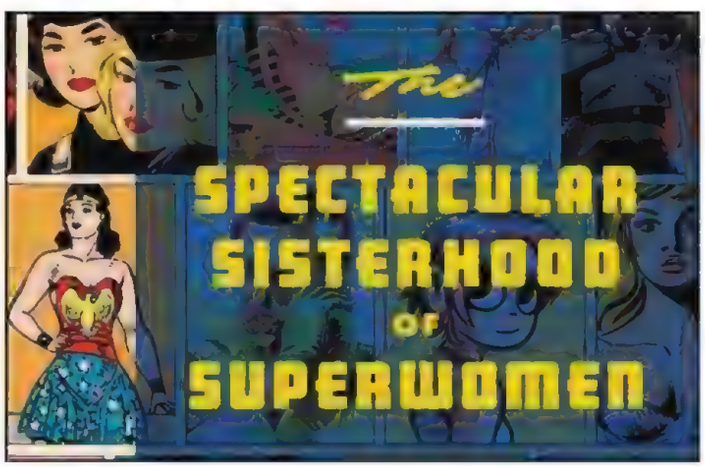
★★★★½ ELDAR

★★★½★ ORKS

★★½★★ KROOT

★½★★★ SQUATS





LIKE, WAY OUT THERE IN SPACE.
GREETINGS! COME IN! TANELEER TIVAN IS THRILLED TO WELCOME YOU TO VIEW HIS EXCITING TRAVELING COLLECTION...

Marvel round-up

The Marvel Universe gains more fans with each passing year, largely due to the expansion of the TV and film projects that feature the brand name. However, when this all began we lived in a time where the films and TV shows were based off of some of our all-time favourite story arcs – but with these new runs, it seems very much the case that the films and TV shows now dictate the style of the comics. For example, when you read the lines of Star-Lord in *Guardians of the Galaxy*, it is very hard to separate him from his film counterpart, Chris Pratt, and likewise with some of the other titles in this round-up.

Guardians of the Galaxy: Mission Breakout does exactly what it says on the tin, and serves as good a starting point as any for fans of the Marvel Universe that are new to the comic world. The dialogue between the characters is easy to digest, with the same style of comedy from the films emulated through the pages of the first issue. It is a throwaway story with nothing that we didn't already know, and so serves perfectly as a standalone storyline. We see the Guardians following a generic storyline (escaping from a rather humorous predicament with their bodies and wits in check), but it's the price that you pay for an accessible story with well-established character demeanours. Even the villain (The Collector) is known to anyone that has watched the films and doesn't really serve any purpose, except to allow for a classic Guardians reaction to incarceration. If the writers moved away from the typical and arguably safe dynamic, we might see these much-loved heroes in more compromising and perilous situations.

> "IT SEEMS THAT THE FILMS NOW DICTATE THE STYLE OF THE COMICS"

The crossover from comic to TV/film universe is a problem once again in the new run of *Luke Cage*. Far from his days in *Alias* with his wife Jessica Jones, we find Luke in what seems to be the first episode of the Netflix TV series. The dialogue is predictable and cheesy, with even Luke's narrations desperately trying to build suspense – even though you can see from the beginning exactly where the story is going. It is an easy page-flicker due to the serious lack of interesting substance, but one could only hope that with time, the story might eventually take a turn for the better and cross some boundaries, not just stick with those of the past.

Despite its generic storyline throughout the first issue – similarly to *Luke Cage* – *Cable* is quite simply much more interesting. The fact that his character can travel through time already adds a couple of points to his Top Trumps card. This fact

also means that there is good opportunity for Cable's past, present and future worlds to collide. You can forgive the cheesy lines in this first issue, simply because if this story is to follow the style of previous runs, things are about to get a whole lot more interesting. Cable is a character that many never want to see fall, and with fights and foes already strewn across the pages, we're certainly in for a ride.

Jean Grey is a character that we are all more than familiar with, and if anything, a new run of comics titled after the famed mutant might not have been what we needed. However, this run from the outset promises to be anything but what we are accustomed to. We follow a young Jean battling the other known versions of herself to become a more reserved contributor to the mutant universe. But we all know how long those hopes and dreams for our favourite characters last. Before long, danger and enemies (some that are in fact very familiar) find Jean and she is once again battling pretty much everything and everyone. What at first seemed to be another generic go at one of the most famous Marvel characters of all time, turns into an enticing run filled with a beautiful art style that has you chomping at the bit for the next issue.

Secret Empire is without a doubt the darkest story arc of this round-up. It follows on from when Captain America was

convinced (or brainwashed, depending on your preference) to bend the knee to his longtime and infamous enemy Hydra. We are pulled straight into an already bleak time in the Marvel universe, only to have it delve deeper and deeper into the darkness – and that is just in the first issue. This huge event probably includes the most characters out of these new runs, and so there will be no shortage of perspective. The brilliant thing about this run so far, is that it communicates a harrowing reality that can only be brought to life through the pages of a comic, and not the typical PG/12 films we see on the big screen. This is certainly not one for beginners, but does promise a lot for veterans. We can now only wait and see how much darker it could get...

Old characters, new runs, cheesy lines and perhaps too much of a nod to their TV and film counterparts. Let's hope that more than just what we expect lies in store. **Amy Best**

Writer: Christopher Hastings
Artists: Allen Martinez, Edgar Salazar
Colourist: Andrew Crossley
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★

Writer: James Robinson
Artist: Carlos Pacheco
Colourist: Jesus Aburtov
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★½

Writer: David F. Walker
Artist: Nelson Blake II
Letterer: Vc Joe Sabino
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★

Writers: Nick Spencer, Chip Zdarsky
Artists: Paulo Siqueira, Andrea Sorrentino, Rod Reis, Daniel Acuña
Colourist: Rod Reis, Daniel Acuña
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-3

★★★

Writer: Dennis Hopeless
Artist: Victor Ibanez
Colourist: Jay David Ramos
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★★

Chances are you've already heard about the biggest moment from Batman 24...

We strongly recommend you check out the latest from Captain Atom

DC Rebirth round-up

If you've craving a *Wonder Woman* fix after catching Diana Prince's awesome antics on the big screen in her first ever movie, then pick up her title book (though maybe wait until issue 24 hits shelves, as issue 23 is the – disappointing – end of a fairly long arc). Once you've done that, you should totally grab a copy of *Trinity 9*, which is the start of a new (potentially very promising) story featuring your new favourite heroine. It opens with Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman reminiscing over a recent adventure, before they're boomed into deep space by Cyborg, who's in a fairly serious predicament. To say any more would stray into spoiler territory, but this is a huge science-fiction concept, delivered via cool art, featuring The Flash being funny. If this latest arc maintains this level of quality, we'll be launching a petition for a big screen adaptation as soon as the conclusion lands on shelves. Batfans will also enjoy *Trinity*, but they have to pick up their hero's current title book.

There's a strong chance you've already heard about the biggest moment of *Batman 24*, mainly because it's significant enough to break out of the comics forums and hit the mainstream press, but if you've managed to avoid it, don't worry – we're not going to ruin it here. Especially as there's so much more to discuss in this magnificent issue. The narrative's essentially constructed of two conversations, the one you probably know about, and one you probably don't. The latter is between Claire Clover (aka Gotham Girl) and Batman, discussing the concept of heroism, and what it means to be a superhero. Here we get significant insight into Batman's current mindset, discovering both why he does what he does, and how he feels when he's doing it. It's powerful, moving, and surprising, with David Finch's flowing art allowing us to enjoy the sheer quality of Tom King's writing. Because of the nature of the issue, and especially that last-page reveal, this is a perfect jumping on point for new fans and lapsed readers alike; it'll catch you up on what Batman's been up to recently, as well as getting you excited about his future adventures. Don't expect epic action, or even a proper villain in this issue – but what's here on the page is as satisfying as Batman's best battles – featuring his toughest foe: the struggles within himself.

Meanwhile, if you want something a bit goofier, seek out *Bane: Conquest 1-2*. It's basically

> "THIS IS A HUGE SCIENCE-FICTION CONCEPT DELIVERED VIA COOL ART, FEATURING THE FLASH BEING FUNNY"

a big, dumb action film in comic book form, complete with guns, explosions and odd idiosyncrasies (Bane keeps a teddy bear in a glass case because reasons), which initially follows our anti-hero as he attempts to protect his city from a major terror-threat, before moving on to a larger mission. So far, so Batman, but Bane's approach to vigilantism cribs more from Frank Castle than Bruce Wayne, and this frequently feels like a *Punisher* book (especially in the John Romita Jr style art). Part of what makes it feel so solid is the fact Bane's finally back in the hands of his original creators, Chuck Dixon and Graham Nolan, who aren't afraid to push their creation to his absolute limits. It's not exactly high-art, but it is super-fun.

Speaking of fun, *Scooby Apocalypse 13* is a better book than you've probably been led to believe by the outcry caused by the (very) modern redesigns of the main characters. Yes, Shaggy looks reaaaally stupid (he's basically a buff hipster), Scrappy Doo's ridiculous (he's even buffer than Shaggy!) and the less said about Velma the better, but dig beneath the surface and there's plenty to enjoy here. Based on an idea by Jim Lee, written by Keith Giffen, this book has serious pedigree (sorry) and it really does show (once you get past the art). Plot-wise, it's essentially the original *Scooby Doo* cartoon meets *The Real Ghostbusters*. You might expect it to be grim and gritty thanks to those new designs, but it's absolutely not - it's as silly as it ever was, but instead of running around haunted theme parks, our heroes are facing larger scale threats. It's definitely not perfect, but worth a try if you can see beyond your nostalgia for the original.

Finally, a recommend for a ridiculously underrated title. *The Fall And Rise Of Captain Atom 1-6* deserves to sell as many copies as DC's big three; it's clever, cool and constantly compelling. The opening high concept is relatively simple - Captain Atom is about to explode, and not even the Justice League can save him. With the soul of the '80s incarnation of Atom, the complexity of the Post-*Crisis* version, with a vivid spirit of its own, *Captain Atom* starts fast and continues at a break-neck pace. Will Conrad's art feels both classical and beautiful - though some die-hard fans might raise a quizzical eyebrow at how much their hero now looks like *Watchmen*'s Dr Manhattan (what was once silver is now blue), but if that mirroring was deliberate, it proves how much confidence DC has in this great title. We'd recommend picking up every back issue you can get your hands on – opening arc *Blowback* is great, and follow-up *Mission Creep* is even better (with significant and emotionally resonant events that will have a lasting impact on the DC universe), this is definitely the best running comic you're not currently collecting.

Sam Ashurst

Buff Hipsters and buffer puppies, the new Scooby Doo is a bit crazy, but worthwhile

Writers: Francis Manapul
Artist: Francis Manapul
Colourist: Francis Manapul
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 9

★★★★½

Writer: Tom King
Artist: David Finch
Colourist: David Finch
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 24

★★★★★

Writer: Chuck Dixon
Artists: Graham Nolan
Colourist: Gregory Wright
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★★½

Writer: Keith Giffen
Artist: Dale Eaglesham
Colourist: Dale Eaglesham
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 13

★★★½☆

Writers: Cary Bates, Greg Weisman
Artists: Will Conrad
Colourist: Ivan Nunes
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-6

★★★★½

New #1s

Star Wars: Poe Dameron (Marvel)
Everybody's new favourite space rogue is under Leia's orders

The Spectacular Spider-Man (Marvel)
Peter Parker returns in a new series from Chip Zdarsky.

A Fractured Mind (Red 5 Comics)
A new detective novel hunts for the killer.

Crosswind (Image)
A Chicago hitman and a Seattle housewife switch places to deadly effect.

Hellyboy: Into The Silent Sea

Writers: Mike Mignola and Gary Gianni
Artist: Gary Gianni
Publisher: Dark Horse

★★★★

Gary Gianni's engraving-like artwork is perfectly suited to this creepy oceangoing yarn that takes place aboard a nineteenth-century sailing ship. Set during the two years Hellboy was lost at sea and slotting into continuity directly after the events of *The Island*, *Into The Silent Sea* finds Big Red chained and held captive by the crew of the aforementioned ship, the Rebecca. The captain spies a moneymaking opportunity and plans to display his demonic-looking prize to crowds, but the crew, more suspicious and superstitious, start grumbling mutinously.

It turns out that the captain is not the true commander of the Rebecca. That role falls to a civilian passenger, a strange, intense pale lady in black who is a member of the Heliopic Brotherhood of Ra. Her researches lead the ship into deep waters, both literally and metaphorically, and things climax in a horrific Lovecraftian finale – with, of course, quite a bit of monster-punching.

Throw in ghosts, zombies and sea beasts, add some dark melancholic flourishes and a dash of pathos, and you have... Well, a typical Hellboy tale. References to Coleridge's *The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner* and the somewhat more obscure poem 'The Pilot' by Thomas Haynes Bayly enhance the eerie maritime mood, but it's Gianni's sumptuous illustration that is the real draw here. Every panel is a thing of beauty in itself, echoing the fluidity and line-laced detail of Gustave Doré and indeed the late lamented Bernie Wrightson (especially the latter's Frankenstein work). The story itself may be slight but the art gives it a memorable heft.

James Lovegrove

The Death of Stalin

Writer: Alex de Campi
Artist: Tony Parker
Publisher: Image
Format: 5-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-4

★★★★

Fabien Nury and Thierry Robin's critically acclaimed graphic novel is finally being translated from its native French for English readers. Inspired by true events, Nury and Robin explore the events that unfolded in the wake of the infamous dictator's stroke, covering his death and the power struggle that ensued.

Leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin's rule lasted from the mid 1920s until his death. He was found in his room on 1 March 1953 in his pyjamas, soaked in his own urine. Stalin had suffered a stroke and in the days that followed it was very touch and go until his eventual death on 5 March 1953.

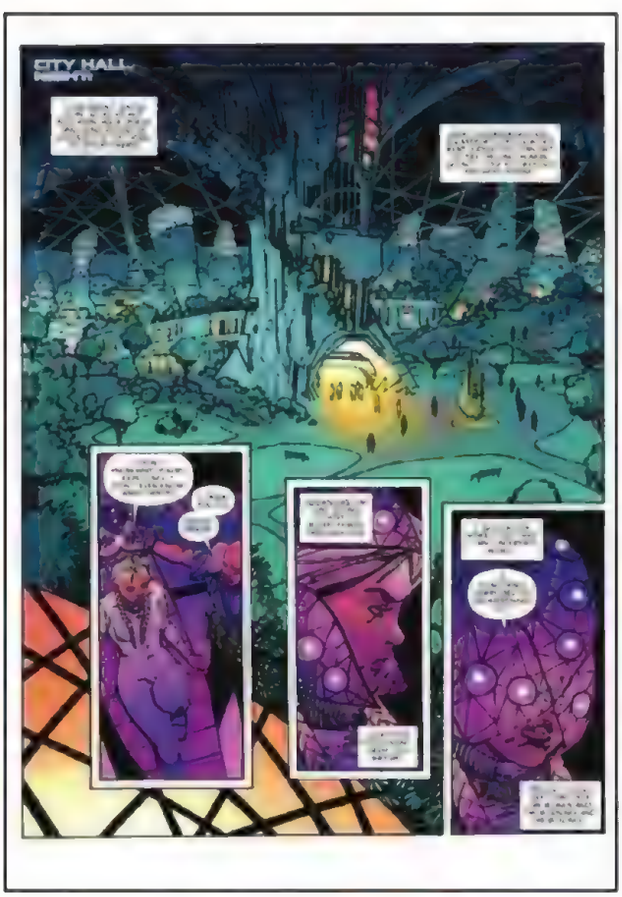
The story begins with a disclaimer that some artistic licence may have been used to convey the story but the real-life events were so ridiculous that little has been changed. The power struggle, accusations of assassination and chaos that followed Stalin's death make for an interesting tale and that draws parallels with the bonkers nature of modern day politics.

Robin's artwork is superb, his dark palette reflecting Minister of Home Affairs' Lavrentiy Beria's sinister nature and clandestine dealings, capturing the grand perspective of Stalin's funeral and the tragic scenes of crowd control.

The graphic novel has already inspired a film, spearheaded by satirist and director Armando Iannucci (Veep), a dab hand when it comes to writing about the ludicrous nature of politics – the perfect man for the job.

The Death of Stalin is a story about power, ego and the absurdity of politics, a tale that feels relevant now more than ever.

Claire Lim



Judge Dredd

Writers: TC Eglington, Si Spencer, Alan Grant, Dan Abnett, Tony Lee
Artists: Karl Richardson, Henry Flint, Paul Marshall, Phil Winslade, Lee Carter
Inker: Eva De La Cruz, Dyan Teague
Letterer: Anne Parkhouse, Simon Bowland, Ellie de Ville
Publisher: Rebellion
Reviewed: Issue 384

★★★½

***Megazine 345* continues several stories, without kickstarting any new ones.** After witnessing a murder while testing a suit that allows them to climb walls, the mob and the Law are after the siblings in the conclusion of 'Gecko'. They have an often tender back and forth – not to mention a cool suit – so it's a shame they had a short run.

Part three of HAVN suggests something is rotten in Nu-Iceland. When a screaming man blows himself up, Judge Hoffman discover he was wearing a collar to disguise his identity – like the recently caught Abby. How many 'Alfar' are secretly living under the dome? We've no idea, but Henry Flint art has a wonderful Seventies sci-fi vibe that is enhanced by Eva de la Cruz's vivid colouring.

Colonial Marshall Metta Lawless' attempt to bring mega-corporation Munce Inc to book has deadly consequences in space western 'Long Range War Part 5'. Dan Abnett's story sets up a shocking betrayal, while Phil Winslade's intricate black-and-white artwork continues to impress.

Despite being the cover feature, 'Dragon Blood: part five' only serves to fill pages. Anderson's daring escape includes hoverboards and psychic dragons, but doesn't do much to move the story along.

However, the first volume of Necrophim also comes with the issue. This dark fantasy about political intrigue amongst the fallen angels of Hell is like an infernal Game of Throne. Lee Carter's greyscale artwork feels appropriately moody and some of his disfigured demons are the stuff of nightmares.

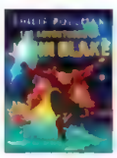
Jack Parsons

Step on board the mysterious ghost ship with John Blake

The Adventures of John Blake

Writer: Philip Pullman
Artist: Fred Bettin
Publisher: Bettin Fickling Books
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Volume 1

★★★★½



A new work from acclaimed author Phillip Pullman is always worth celebrating – but his first original graphic novel? Well, that's certainly worth your attention.

Collaborating with illustrator Fred Fordham, *The Adventures of John Blake: Mystery of the Ghost Ship* manages to straddle the line between nostalgic and fantastical, familiar but ultimately fresh; an action-adventure that combines a simplistic storytelling style with an undeniable thrust. Of course, that will leave many of us wanting more. *Mystery Of The Ghost Ship* is a quick read, although that speaks to its qualities more so than any perceived lack of depth. Given that this first volume is published through Dave Fickling Books – aimed at the eight-to-12-year old crowd – it could be assumed that the continuing adventures of John Blake wouldn't offer enough substance to engage an older audience. Thankfully, that isn't the case here as Pullman weaves a suitably wondrous tale, a smart and subtle convergence of science-fiction and fantasy. A ghost ship caught out of time, an eclectic crew searching for a way to find their when, and John Blake ensuring the adventure is as preposterous as it is enduring. Pullman and Fordham is a wicked pairing, and we hope to see more from them in the future. **Josh West**

Lawless: Welcome To Badrock

Writer: Dan Abnett
Artist: Phil Winslade
Letterer: Ellie de Ville
Publisher: DC
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Volume 1

★★★★★

Set in the *Judge Dredd* universe, the first collection of *2000 AD*'s breakouts is *Lawless: Welcome To Badrock* headed by writer Dan Abnett with art from Phil Winslade – both are familiar talents to *2000 AD* and the world of *Judge Dredd*.

Set after the events of Abnett's Insurrection, those who are new to the series will still be able to jump onboard and treat *Lawless* as a standalone story. Marshal Meta Lawson finds herself assigned to the town of Badrock on the planet 43 Rega, still healing from an invasion by alien race the Zhind. Badrock is a no-good town and Lawson finds herself trying to keep the peace stuck between the dregs and troublemakers, assisted by Nerys Pettifer and hulking mutant gorilla Kill-A-Man Jaroo.

Lawless is a wonderful Mad Max-esque style space opera full of bizarre characters. The subtle complexities of Badrock's politics and society are as enjoyable a read as the mystery of Metta Lawson herself. She's a badass judge with a no bullshit attitude when it comes to crime, but Abnett never strays into familiar territory with the trope.

Winslade's art is stunning; every mutant, human, creature and robot is a fascinating glimpse into the creator's mind-sets – a wild west tale in space. From the vast wasteland to the striking detail and expression, combined with superb sci-fi storytelling, this is a creative match made in heaven. *Welcome To Badrock* has 'potential film script' written all over it. **Claire Lim**

A small glimpse into the mind-set of artist Phil Winslade

Star Wars: Doctor Aphra

Writer: Kieron Gillen
Artist: Kev Walker
Penciller: Marc Deering
Inker: Antonio Fabela
Letterer: Joe Caramagna
Publisher: Marvel
Format: 6-issue volume
Reviewed: Volume 1

★★★★

One of the more popular new characters to emerge from *Star Wars*' Disney-induced comic-book resurgence, the revelation that rogue 'archaeologist' Doctor Aphra would be getting her own series was both welcome in that she was getting the exposure the character deserved, and refreshing in its indication that they wouldn't just be focusing on the old favourites.

Saying that, nostalgia has been the buzzword in the new *Star Wars* era, and Aphra's choice of companions are indicative of this: bounty-hunter wookiee Black Krrsantan (who only sticks around because of the heavy debt owed to him by Aphra), and homicidal C-3P0 and R2-D2 analogues 0-0-0 and BT-1, whose solution to every situation generally involves a heavy overdose of as much capital-r ruthlessness as possible.

Moreover, the *Star Wars* moral patchwork has become progressively more grey of late, and again that's reflected here. As evidenced by her willingness to work with Darth Vader, she's morally bankrupt and out for herself, yet she's still easy to root for. This could be attributed to the tried and tested method of surrounding her with a number of similarly self-centred companions, but that would be to do a disservice to the work Kieron Gillen has done in creating a character to stand out alongside some of cinema's most classic creations.

Essentially, this is *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* in space, and every bit as fun as it sounds. The next volume will be crossover-heavy, so in the meantime, treasure this slice of Aphra getting her own space. **Steve Wright**

Slaine: The Brutania Chronicles – Book Three: Psychopomp

Writer: Pat Mills
Artist: Simon Davis
Letterer: Ellie de Ville
Publisher: Rebellion
Reviewed: Volume 3

★★★★

When *The Brutania Chronicles* kicked off it was the perfect jumping-on point for those who had seen blood-splattered panels of Slaine in *2000AD*, but weren't familiar with his 30-year backstory. Three books on, the overarching plot of *The Chronicles* is no longer quite as accessible. However, *Psychopomp* is a surprisingly introspective instalment, which anyone can enjoy as a character-rich one-shot.

Psychopomp picks up straight from where Book Two left off, with Slaine trapped by Lord Weird and going head-to-head with supernatural warrior The Primordial. After a fulfilling fight, the latter half of the volume sees Lord Weird invade Slaine's thoughts to confront the source of his rage: the love of his mother, who was killed by his abusive father.

While long-time fans will have heard the story of Macha's death before, writer Pat Mills makes her more than a plot device. Through a series of sepia-toned flashbacks, Macha is revealed to be a kick-ass huntress that taught Slaine to fight, but is shown to have had her own human flaws. These revelations have a dramatic effect, leading our hero to doubt himself in the midst of battle.

Rather than turning Slaine into a soap opera, this family drama elevates the story to the mythological levels Mills has always been inspired by. Artist Simon Davis' mix of smudged watercolours and scratched pen and ink also has a mythic quality that matches both the hack-and-slash of battle scenes and the dream-like quality of the flashbacks. **Jack Parsons**

Kirby: King Of Comics

Writer: Mark Evanier
Publisher: Abrams
Format: Biography/Art Book

★★★★★

If the history of comic book art was to be taught in schools, then Jack Kirby's work would be the first lesson. The impact he made on the form is something we take for granted now, and he is still emulated today. Before Kirby, comics were much like newspaper strips featuring still figures. Kirby added motion and made the pages come to life. He also helped create some of the most iconic characters in comics.

Almost ten years after *Kirby: King Of Comics* was originally published, Mark Evanier has gone through his biography of the legendary artist, added a new chapter, rewritten bits and replaced some of the artwork with pieces he has gathered since 2008. The 240-page book is part biography and part coffee-table art book – the majority of it is the latter. This means it doesn't go as in-depth as you would expect from a typical biography, but there are several anecdotal stories shared by Jack and his wife Roz before their passing.

There are stories from Kirby on the people he worked with and the inspirations behind the titles. The artwork featured includes pieces spanning his entire career, varying from original pencils to one-off sketches. It's truly a book fit for a king. **Aiden Dalby**

Dredd/Anderson: The Deep End

Writer: Alec Worley, Arthur Wyatt
Artist: Paul Davidson, Ben Willsher
Publisher: Rebellion
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Volume 1

★★★★½

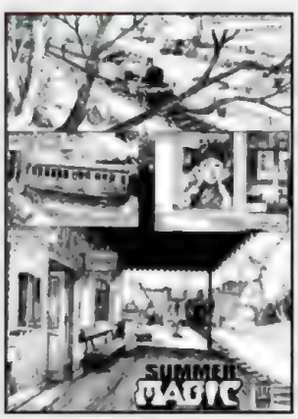
She may have made her debut in the '80s, but it feels like it's only recently that Judge Anderson has seen a true resurgence in popularity across the board in Mega City One. *The Deep End* is, for all intents and purposes, a continuation of the chaos that unfolded in the movie *DREDD*, pushing Anderson back into the spotlight as she struggles with the realities of acting as judge, jury and executioner. Writer Alec Worley does a fantastic job of bringing colour to the character, one thrust into situations where the line between right and wrong can so often be black and white. The real star may, as is so often the case with 2000AD, may indeed buy the pencils from artist Paul Davidson, who never fails to bring substance to every scene with his rough and evocative style. A must-read for any fans desperate to continue Anderson's journey. **Josh West**

Summer Magic: The Complete Journal Of Luke Kirby

Writer: Alan McKenzie
Artist: John Ridgway
Publisher: 2000AD
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Volume 1

★★★★★

2000AD has built itself something of a reputation over the decades; it's the company you come to when you want a dose of science fiction, high-intensity action or gritty war stories. For a quaint, evocative, 'coming of age' story focused on the adventures of an isolated British boy wizard? Well, in that instance you'd probably look to J.K. Rowling, right? Well, maybe not. Unearthed from the vaults, this monster collected edition is some of writer Alan McKenzie and artist John Ridgway's best work. Equally bewitching and entertaining, these adventures are a great read, subverting a number of broody boy wizard tropes in a classically 2000AD way. **Josh West**



One-Eyed Jack

Writer: Alex de Campi
Artist: Tony Parker
Publisher: Image
Format: 5-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-4

★★★★

Detective Jack McBane (yes, really) is a one-eyed police detective operating out of 1970s New York. Uncompromising, brutal, principled and angry, he's the cop the city deserves and needs.

Originally published in 1971 as part of the comic *Valiant*, Jack McBane is an important part of British comic history. John Wagner would of course go on to co-create Judge Dredd, but the style of the title is just as important as what would grow from it. Unflinching, nasty and French Connection-esque, this was one of the first modern instances of a comic aimed pretty solidly at an older audience. *Valiant* may not have worked but *Battle Picture Weekly*, where Jack transferred, did, and the two titles paved the way not just for Judge Dredd but for 2000AD and everything that's sprung from it.

The stories have, inevitably, aged, but Wagner could write a rock-solid action beat even then. An early story sees Jack hospitalised and given a week's vacation because the department doesn't need a man with a vendetta. He's checked himself out by the next panel, of course.

Later stories feature him clashing with corrupt cops and going undercover as the most violent taxi driver on the planet to solve a case. As the series goes on, Jack's actions get even larger and more extreme, culminating in a story that sees him disgraced and living as a normal citizen. Albeit grumpily and for all the right, and very manly, reasons.

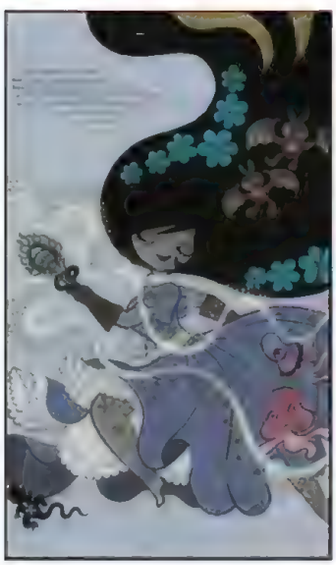
The series is classic meat and two veg-style action, but Wagner is still one of the best writers for that and Cooper's brawny art is a perfect fit for this cheerfully violent world.

Alasdair Stuart

Ravina The Witch

Writer: Junko Mizuno
Artist: Junko Mizuno
Publisher: Titan Comics
Format: 47-page book
Reviewed: Volume 1

★★★★★



***Ravina The Witch* is one of the most captivating visual experiences you can hope for in such a small book.** Junko Mizano's fuses shōjo manga with a very Western, pop-art influenced style that results in a dreamy, otherworldly noir affair that has a unique visual language and weaves narrative and imagery together seamlessly.

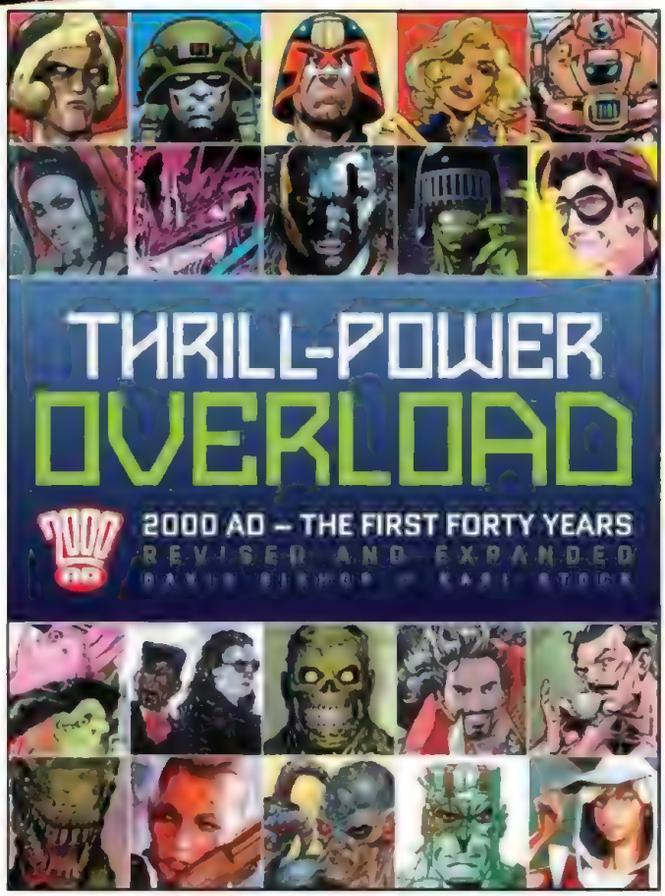
The story – focusing on the eponymous Ravina – explores what it is to be normal and what it is to have that normality challenged, removed. Think of the book as a more modern, easternised version of Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland* – it has that dreamlike detachment from reality while somehow remaining grounded and spinning a relatable, satisfying tale. Hints of eroticism, talking cabbages and Grimm inspiration all come together artisanally in Ravina – we recommend it highly.

Dom Peppiatt

Coming up

SpongeBob Comics: Treasure Chest by Stephen Hillenburg (Abrams ComicArts)
A bit of fun for the child within you, this new release collates the best of the comics. It's a must-have for fans of the famous sponge who lives in a pineapple under the sea. Out 3 October for £21.99.

Marley's Ghost by Harvey Kurtzman (H Kurtz)
Adaptating the brain child of Harvey Kurtzman is Shannon Wheeler, Gideon Kendall and Josh O'Neill taking his original notes to form a fully realised expansion of Charles Dickens' famed novel. Out 15 October for £6.99.



Thrill-Power Overload

Writers: David Bishop and Karl Stock
Publisher: 2000AD

★★★★

Coinciding with the 40th birthday of the *Galaxy's Greatest Comic* comes this revamped, updated edition of the 30th-anniversary book. The original text by former-Tharg David Bishop has been added to by journalist Karl Stock, offering a comprehensive, well-researched and lavishly illustrated document of the life of 2000AD so far.

The swirling chaos that attended the comic's birth forms the most fascinating part of the story. During its early years 2000AD seemed to lurch from one crisis to the next, under ever-present threat of cancellation by the powers-that-be at parent company IPC. Instances of rampant ego abound, mostly related to founding father Pat Mills, who, judging by the interview quotations here, seems not to have a good word for anyone but himself. Then again, without Mills's determination, irascibility and implacable self-confidence, 2000AD would not have lasted much beyond its initial issues, let alone survived past the date of its title. His vision of a punk-tinged, European-style anthology has yielded numerous iconic characters, not least Judge Dredd, and become the launch pad for the careers of a roster of stellar creators too long to list here.

This is a terrific tale, honestly told, and only in its final section – detailing the period from the turn of the century onwards, as the comic became part of the establishment it used to mock – does *Thrill-Power Overload's* narrative flag. 2000AD remains vibrant and vital but, just like a comics equivalent of Ken Livingstone, never again will it seem quite as hair-raisingly seditious as it did back in its late-'70s/early-'80s heyday. **James Lovegrove**

The Spectacular Sisterhood Of Superwomen

Writers: Hope Nicholson
Publisher: Quirk Books

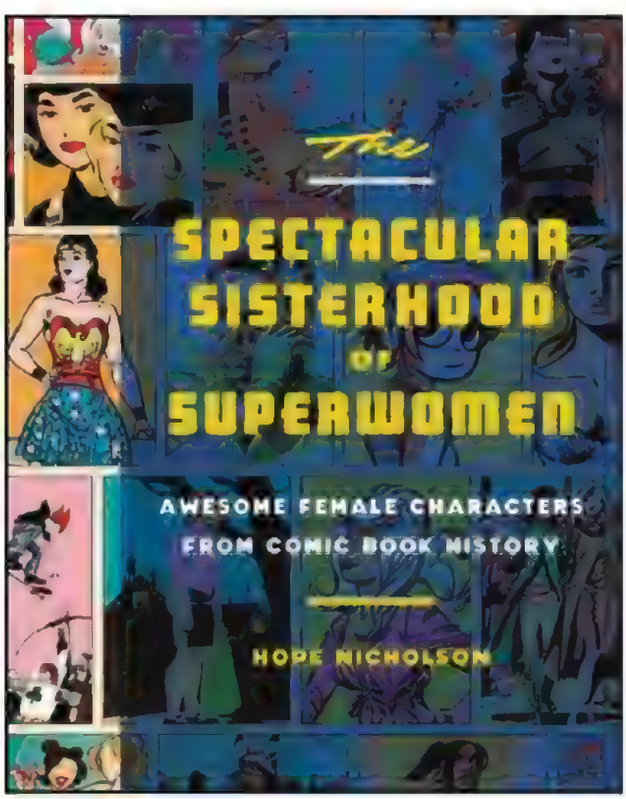
★★★★

Hope Nicholson's entertaining survey of female comics characters is, as she says in her introduction, "not a definitive one" but finds value in the objects of its study "not only because they're easily lost to the sands of time, but also because they're usually much more interesting than their male counterparts."

Taking a decade-by-decade approach from the 1930s to today, Nicholson includes everyone you might expect – Wonder Woman, Supergirl, Ms. Tree, Vampirella, Maggie Chascarillo, Amanda Waller, Jessica Jones, both Ms Marvels – but leavens her choices with some left-field inclusions. For instance, she offers stout defences of frothy lightweights like Dazzler and Squirrel Girl. She also unearths some vintage obscurities – Gail Porter: Girl Photographer, anyone? – and finds redeeming qualities in even the trashiest of creations, such as 1970s sex-adventuress Superbitch (who can knock out opponents with her mighty expanding breasts). Indie titles get a good look-in, and you'll find plenty of recommendations here to investigate.

The book's eclectic approach means you won't always agree with Nicholson's arguments. Her dislike of *Scott Pilgrim's* Ramona Flowers is surprising, and she has little love for *Watchmen's* Silk Spectre. There's a distinct, disproportionate bias towards comics from her native Canada too.

What comes across, above all, is a full-spectrum passion for comics, delivered knowledgeably and with an impish wit. If nothing else, the book demonstrates, in the era of *Pretty Deadly*, *Bitch Planet* and *Saga*, how far the medium has come in its representation of women from its beginnings. **James Lovegrove**



2000AD Prog 2030

Writer: Dan Abnett, Ian Edginton, Kek-W, Pat Mills, TC Eglinton
Artist: Colin Macneil, D-Israel, Nick Cyer, Dave Kendall, INJ Culbard
Colourist: Chris Blythe
Letterer: Annie Parkhouse, Ellie de Ville, Simon Bowland
Publisher: 2000AD
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Volume

★★★★

***Sons of Booth* puts Dredd in familiar and potentially dangerous territory.** The series has always excelled when it's addressed the issues of its time and used Mega-City One as a lens to view them through. Everything from Eglington's script to Chris Blythe's urban, washed-out colours excels.

With *Defoe*, Pat Mills's 17th Century zombie hunter has found a perfect home. The story is great fun, being a noir-esque setup for dirty deeds in the shadow of the post-apocalypse. Ellie De Ville's letters are top notch too.

Abnett's *Brink* is next with art by INJ Culbard and lettering by Simon Bowland. Bridget Kurtis, cop-turned-consultant on a space station construction project, is a fun lead and gets to do some top-level snarking. Culbard's art is extraordinary, and Bowland's lettering ties it all together.

Scarlet Traces, Ian Edginton and D'Israeli's alternate history of *The War Of The Worlds*, is one of the best sci-fi stories of the last two decades. The new volume continues here, and sees Earth struggling to deal with an influx of Venusian refugees and a Martian assault. Edginton has a keen ear for naturalistic dialogue and a nasty sense of humour.

Finally, *Cursed: The Fall Of Deadworld* has everything stacked against it. It's another mid-run story, a return to the Dark Judge well that we visit often and has frequently been dry. However, from the first panel to the last, Kek-W's script impresses. Action defines character and there's a tangible sense of dread. It's all presented in detailed art from Kendall, and de Ville once again provides lettering and helps deliver the crucial impact needed. **Alasdair Stuart**

Tekken

Writer: Cavan Scott
Artist: Andie Tong
Inker: Marcio Menyz
Publisher: Titan Comics
Format: 4-issue series
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★½

***Tekken*'s story has always been a bit of a myopic mess – there's a huge cast of characters in the parent game series, and when the only story you really need to tell is about people beating each other up, it's easy to lose focus and flit around from fighter to fighter aimlessly, struggling to snap to a single, meaningful storyline.**

Tekken #1 is the establishing issue of a four-part story arc that ties directly into the upcoming release of *Tekken 7*. The first few pages of the issue use assets and 3D renders from the game to summarise the story so far, explaining that the patricidal Mishima family have been vying for control of the Mishima Zaibatsu for years, and that the youngest member of the family – Jin – is lumbered with an unwanted evil in his blood he's tried (and failed) to exorcise.

The story proper picks up here, switching to a gorgeous, sketchy art style reminiscent of Nineties *X-Force* comics thanks to Andie Tong's penmanship and Marcio Menyz's moody, *Blade Runner*-esque colouring. The art seems based on how Liefeld brought his characters to life: the proportions of the cast become...unrealistic, but in a context like *Tekken*, it's a strong stylistic choice and suits the angry, revenge-fuelled story perfectly.

Fans of the game series will enjoy the personality etched into each character (Paul Phoenix especially), however newcomers to the franchise may feel lost pretty early on. The story *is* top-heavy and cumbersome, but the kung-fu movie plotline mixed with the dystopian near-future aesthetic works a treat, and draws on all of *Tekken*'s strengths with obsessive enthusiasm. **Dom Peppiatt**

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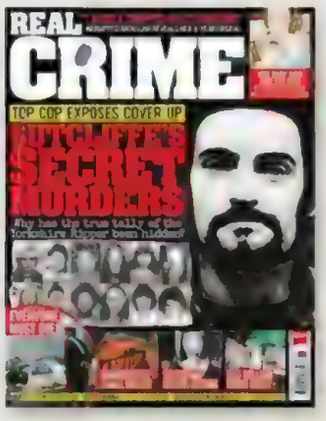

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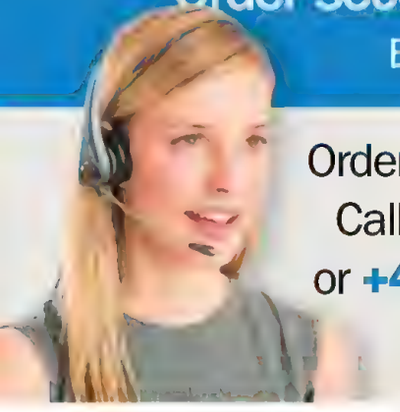

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STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

Miles Hamer picks out some of the best self-published comics right now. If you have created a comic, in print or online, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at ***stateofindependents@gmail.com***

THE ETHER

Story by Matt Garvey
Art by Dizevez

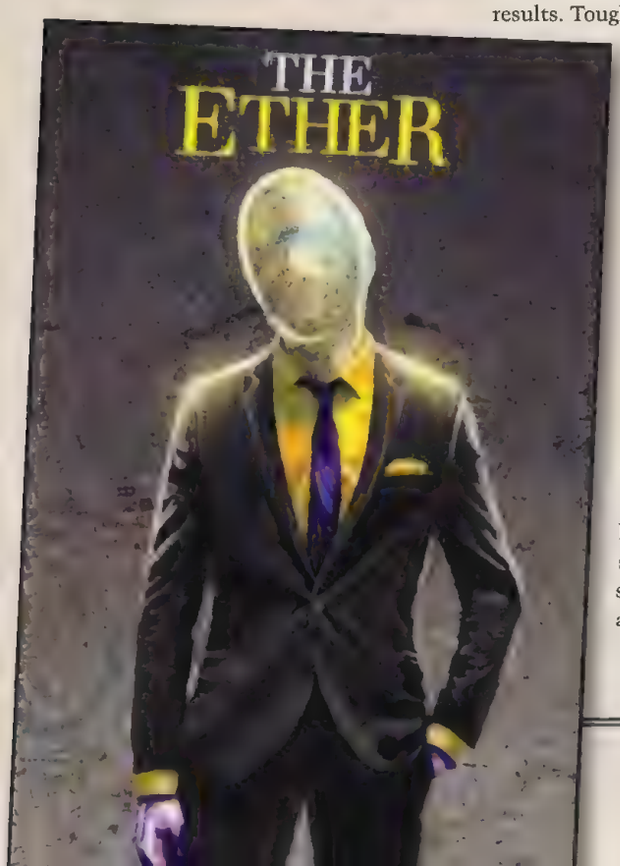
mattgarvey.co.uk

The latest crime-fighting thriller from indie talent Matt Garvey packs a seriously grizzled punch. Conjuring the rain-soaked murk of Britain's gloomy, uninviting streets at night, this is the start of a new comic title and story arc from which kids' eyes should most definitely be averted.

A child murderer is on the loose, and there is a seedy line of enquiry to be made if the cops want to catch their killer.

But there's one masked avenger they'll let make a few house calls if it means them getting their desired results. Tough as titanium and swathed in mystery, the sharp-dressed Ether carries more than a little Rorschach to the character, and even a little Ditko-era Question too. Wearing a London map as a mask and identity-concealing suit, there's a twist to the character that's as intriguing as it is heart-breaking.

Featuring the watercolour glow of Dizevez's soft strokes, the artwork lends a lightness of touch to a story that is otherwise saturated in grit. A truly arresting comic.



COGNITION

Story by Ken Reynolds **Art by** Sam Bentley

cognitioncomic.bigcartel.com

A robot inhabited by the spirit of a human and a rat with the soul of a demon, Ken Reynolds' supernatural saga isn't your average ye olde tale. A fiercely British take on powerful folklore, *Cognition* features the government-sanctioned duo undertaking duty for BOSS, the British Occult Secret Service. Imagine James Bond with a wand instead of a Walther PPK and, you're getting there, sort of.

A weave of magic and detective work, this is a dark, enchanting book that tackles underhand tricksters and demons in its stride, with an impressively sardonic hue. Sam Bentley's monochromatic renderings are strikingly resplendent; here is clearly an artist who takes malevolent delight in a bold, exclamatory splash page. Spellbinding.

THE CTHULHIAD

Story and Art by Gareth Sleightholme
thecthulhiad.wordpress.com

Artist and creator Gareth Sleightholme's *The Cthulhiad* is a mighty invention. A collection of macabre comics and stories, there's connective tissue between the author's creations, with multiple chapters and instalments that centre on gods, monsters, and myths. With many various instalments, it's a universe big enough to get lost in; a jumble of genres all fighting for attention, including some always welcome hardboiled detection. The art grounds the madness however, with Sleightholme's exceptional style demonstrating a rare talent that sits easily with the best the industry has to offer. If you want a swirling, intoxicating, multi-layered universe to explore, you could do worse than investigate *The Cthulhiad.*

KILLING MOON #2

Story by Chris Denton **Art by** Newil 'Bhuna' Roche
Colouring by Darren Stephens **Lettering by** Bolt-01
Comicsy.co.uk/pigdogpress

Pigdog Press' inimitable brand of fun sauce gets poured over all this, their follow up to the inaugural issue released in 2015. Continuing the adventures of the eponymous assassin gang, this time the focus is on Ingrid, who's handy in a fight and taking on wolfmen and an undead neck-muncher.

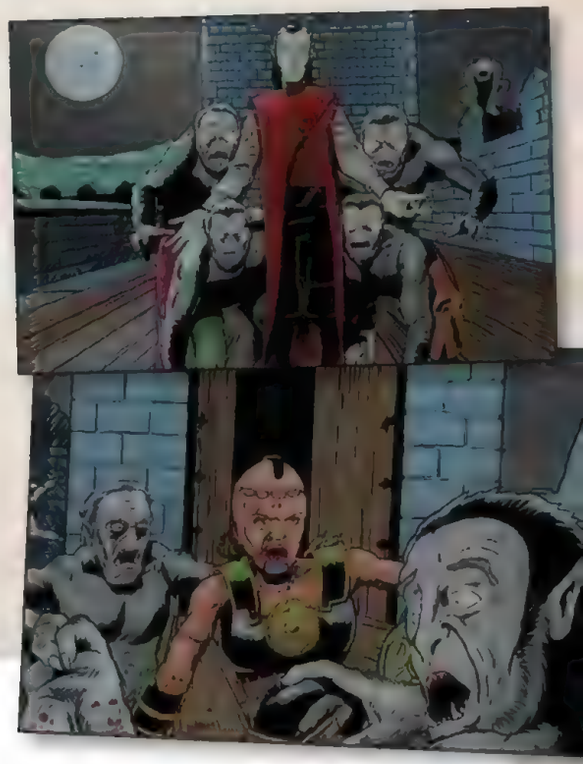
It's a frantic, medieval knockabout romp that pelts along with ferocious bite. Dynamic, sinewy fun that eschews ye olde dialogue in favour of snappy wit, there's lots to like about *Killing Moon* and even more to love. The winning combination of bloodshed and broadswords is bettered only by its jaunty tone, providing the cinematic escapism of a Saturday matinee. If you're after a simple blast of irreverent action, reach for the Moon.

ELEVATOR

Story by Dwight L. MacPherson **Art by** Randy Valiente
Lettering by Marco Della Verde
tinyurl.com/elevatorcomic

A dark plunge into hellish territory, fledgling indie publisher Hocus Pocus Comics take the descent into the underworld in a modern redux of classic poem, Dante's Inferno. Returning to the family home following their father's murder, brothers Edward and Richard Bane are faced with a curiously sinister mystery surrounding their family legacy. It all points to an elevator ride, and the only way is, you guessed it, down. But what waits at the bottom for the intrepid siblings and accompanying buddies almost certainly isn't worth inheriting...

Despite the spooky subject matter, *Elevator is* a sprightly story, told with bounce, and a keen pacing matched pleasingly with a clean layout. The scratched black inks serve perfectly the narrative: the nerve-shredding action is sprinkled with a jittery energy that pops and judders, but holds back respectfully when the story needs to breathe. A fun journey to the depths of deviousness that looks set to tingle the terror bones.



THE BLUE FLAME

Story and Art by Rees Finlay
kickstarter.com/projects/reesfinlay/the-blue-flame-an-autobiography

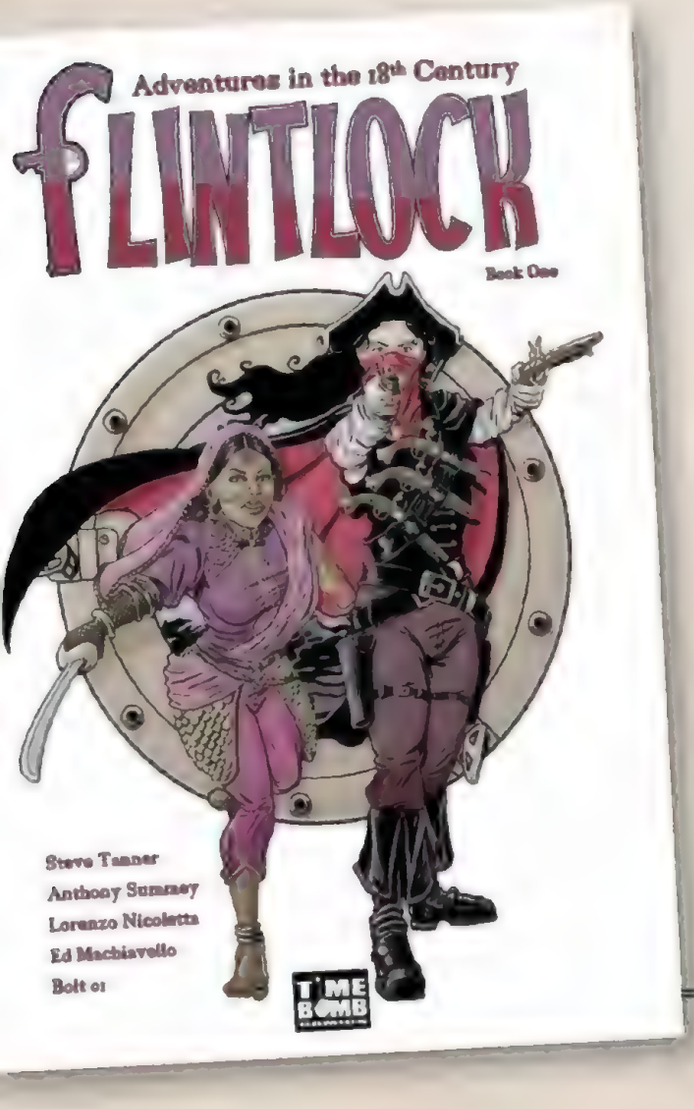
A candid autobiography - of sorts – from writer/illustrator Rees Finlay, The Blue Flame takes a post-modern, potted history of its author and lays bare his soul in the process. Starting at the arse end of his life, the narrative takes a jigsaw approach to his days that piece together towards a touching and gripping climax.

A poetic tale that explores literal chapters of the author's years in a bid to make sense of his life choices, it's an adult story of both regret and rumination. Mercifully, it avoids the typical pitfalls of artistic egotism. Meta and self-absorbed, certainly, but its confessional manner is refreshingly self-deprecatory and laugh-out-loud funny in places. Very few other writers would be able to be this bold or upfront about their perceived failures throughout their lives, and we should be grateful to him for it. Rees, it's been emotional.

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

SHOOT TO THRILL

The indie comic scene has done nothing but grow in recent years, with the addition of online funding schemes such as Patreon and Kickstarter (to name but two). **Steve Tanner** went that exact route last year to launch his latest project, *Flintlock*. **Joel Meadows** found out more from the man himself



Below: Tanner's current project includes *Flintlock*, featuring Steampunk bandits

Steve Tanner created Time Bomb Comics back in 2007 to publish one shots and graphic novels. In fact, the British independent publisher celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, with books like *Defiant*, *Bomb Scares Vols 1* and *2* and *Ragamuffins: Stitch In Time* under their belt. In 2016, they decided to fund adventure anthology *Flintlock* using Kickstarter, the second time they did this (the first was with *Bomb Scares*). It worked and they have just published a second volume of *Flintlock*, which is out now. *Comic Heroes* spoke to Tanner to find out about the genesis of *Flintlock*, the crowdfunding experience and the appeal of creating your own anthology comic.

"*Flintlock: Book One* took about 18 months from coming up with the concept to launch," Tanner reveals to me when I speak to him recently.

He has been using Kickstarter for a very specific purpose, he explains.

"I'm using Kickstarter as a pre-order business model, and I think it's important to highlight that. It's difficult to get an Indie book noticed, even harder to get them into the comic stores, so I'm finding crowd-funding an interesting alternative route to market. That strategy then dictates the overall campaign – my financial target is always very low, the postage is worked out at cost, and the base book price is cheaper than it will be after it has been published.

"For several years I was very anti-Kickstarter," Tanner continues, "but then I realised that my issues weren't based around the platform itself but how it was being used by some of those adopting it. For example, I was seeing books sold at two or three times the price they would be when at the convention tables or the funding targets were so astronomically high as to be ridiculous. And don't get me started on the time is takes for projects to deliver. To me, if someone has faith in your book to pay for it in advance they should be getting a better deal than those that buy off the shelf.

"Similarly," he adds, "if your project is funded you've essentially entered into a contract with all those who have helped you – so then going off and working on something else and making those good people wait much longer than they expected to is just wrong. You've received the money, you've been paid for the job, now go and do it."

Tanner is weary of these ideals with every use of the platform. "That's why regardless of the level you pledge at with the *Flintlock* pre-order campaigns your digital or printed copy of the book will always cost less than cover price. The low overall target also means the stretch goals can be triggered earlier, so the opportunity to reward backers further then presents itself quicker. It's about properly rewarding anyone who's pre-ordered the book, not penalising them," he tells us.

Flintlock features three different stories (*Lady Flintlock, Shanti* and *The Clockwork Cavalier*), all written by Tanner. He enjoyed the variety of writing three very diverse and different characters, all united by a common historical setting.

"As with any anthology *Flintlock* presents an opportunity to tell a range of stories. The linked theme is the 100 years that make up the 18th century, which is a very broad yet concentrated backdrop and allows for a wide range of possibilities character-wise. Going back to my original notes for the series it quickly became apparent that this backdrop allowed me to conceive a wide range of characters that are very different to one another yet still fit in the period. Not all made the final cut, of those that did some have yet to be seen. This also seems a good opportunity to mention the shared timeline – all the characters co-exist within the *Flintlock* century, although they maybe decades apart from one another. Some will meet, some won't, and some who may be considered bit-players will turn out to have major parts to play as the series progresses," Tanner informs us.

He was very aware of just how important a role the artists on each of the strips would play.

"A huge part of *Flintlock*'s success has been the artistic talent involved, no doubt about it. Putting the team together, the thing I was most conscious of was the setting and how that needed to be properly realised. It's one thing to be able to draw a recognisable Batman – but a horse? Or a period street scene? Quite frankly, that's not something that every artist would warm to."

"He enjoyed the variety of writing three very diverse and different characters"

Above: *Titular character Lady Flintlock shows her two sides*

Left: *We wouldn't mess with the good lady if we were you*

Of his team he tells us, "Anthony Summey had recently drawn an incredibly detailed short story for the 2015 *Bomb Scares* anthology book, and it happened to have an 18th-century setting. As soon as I saw that I got in touch with him and offered him Lady Flintlock. Anthony's a huge fan of the period so he was up for it and is doing an amazing job. There's a whole Al Williamson/Alex Raymond feel about his artwork and that classic style of his is just beautiful.

"Lorenzo Nicoletta came via the submissions pile. For a small set-up *Time Bomb Comics* receives a fair few

submissions, either as completed works seeking publication or writers and artists sending through spec samples. So I have a potential talent pool that's being regularly updated and Lorenzo's work stood out as being a good fit for *Shanti*. He's a really talented newcomer, and you can already see the progression in his work from *Book One* to *Book Two*. I had the pleasure of meeting him as well, when he came over to England to be with me at a con. He's a great bloke!

"Edgard Machiavello was a combination of both those elements," Tanner continues. "I'd already seen his work previously and he'd also sent me some separate samples. There's a dynamism to Ed's style that seemed a perfect fit for *The Clockwork Cavalier* and pairing him up with that character has been spot on. The pages he's producing are just remarkable. In *Book Two* the *Cavalier* story is set in and around St Paul's Cathedral. That's a location that would challenge the best of artists and Ed has, well, his pages for that are just jaw-dropping."

And it doesn't stop there, Tanner has a plan for the future in place already. " I have artists Caroline Parkinson and David Morris, both of whom are working some new character storylines for *Book Three* and beyond. These are creators I'm a personal fan of, and they've come to me because of *Flintlock: Book One*. They enjoyed the book and want to be involved, and I'm delighted that they are," Tanner recalls.

It is the variety of the different artists that he sees as one of the strongest aspects of the series.

"I think one of the strengths of an anthology is that it offers differing styles, which is something I've also tried to achieve with the scripts themselves – you'll notice that the pacing and tone of *Lady Flintlock* is very different to *Shanti*, and different again for the *Clockwork Cavalier*. Adopting a cookie-cutter approach was never a consideration – if you want that uniformity of style just have one artist draw the whole thing, right?," he asks.

With any historical series, it stands or falls on its research and the creator is all too conscious of this.

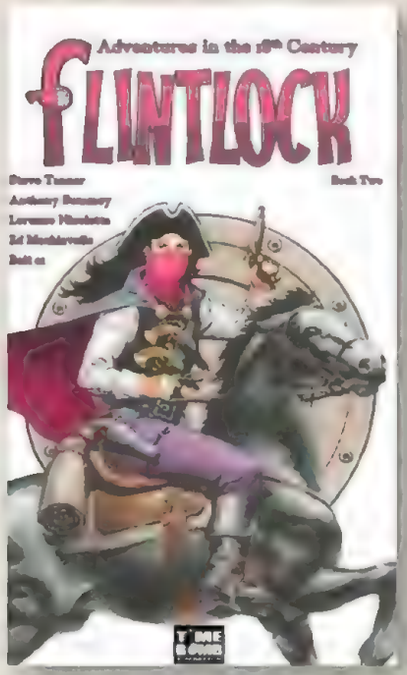
"All the stories are rooted in fact, in particular the *Clockwork Cavalier* stories which features a character very much inspired by that notorious fake 18th Century automaton The Turk. There's the London setting too, and the real historical figures involved with the Bow Street Runners – more research went into that third story than those first two!", Tanner admits.

Flintlock features characters quite different to those who would have appeared in adventure strips years ago. But it was essential for Tanner to reflect modern society in them.

"A lot of what inspired *Flintlock* is down to the gender politics of today rather than 300 years ago. Sure, many of the characters in the *Flintlock* stories will behave and react with 18th-century values and in many ways the culture of the time drives the stories in this way. That can be a limitation – these characters can't just behave like contemporary people wearing hats and wigs like we'd think – but also provides a wealth of plot and interaction dynamics ripe for exploration.

But let's look at where we are now, and how those characters are perceived today, because that's a huge part of what I'm trying to do with *Flintlock* as a whole. At the series core, *Flintlock* is about telling adventure stories using comics as the medium to tell them.

"I think one of the strengths of an anthology is that is offers differing styles"



Left: *Tanner has raised four times his original Kickstarter goal to continue publishing the comic books*

Below: *The art has a very distinctive style, with a great tone and tempo*

"With any historical series, it stands or falls on its research"

"... AND IT IS DOWN TO THE ACTIONS OF A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL!"
LADY
FLINTLOCK
"ONE FOR SORROW"
WRITTEN BY: STEVE TANNER
ART BY: ANTHONY SUMMERS
LETTERS BY: BOLT-01

Left: *Flintlock centres around the actions of our heroine*

Below: *Flintlock offers a widely researched historical context*

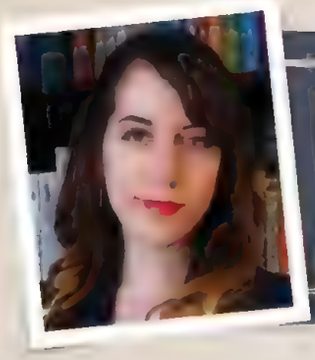
Beyond that, though, is an effort to bring characters to comics that we don't usually see," he reveals. There are plans for more *Flintlock*, he explains.

"I'm committed to six books, published over the next couple of years. By the end of *Flintlock: Book Six*, the serialised *Lady Flintlock* story will be completed and five other leading characters will have been introduced all with their own stories within the specific, 100-year timeline."

Flintlock Books 1 and 2 are available to order from the Time Bomb Comics website: **www.timebombcomics.com/products**

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

KICKSTARTING COMICS



Robin Hoelzemann's *Curia Regis* is a highlight of the UK independent comic scene. Initially a web comic, it recently made the step across to print thanks to a Kickstarter campaign. Balanced on a knife-edge between fantasy, historical thriller and conspiracy series, it's about to head into its second and final act. We talked to Robin about webcomics, crowdfunding, alternate history and more

So, what is *Curia Regis*?
Curia Regis (*CR*) is an 18th century-inspired fictional history about trying to steal a country. It follows Maren, a courtier about to have her loyalties and ethics tested, and Jacques, an heir to a contested throne, as they try and make the future they want a reality.

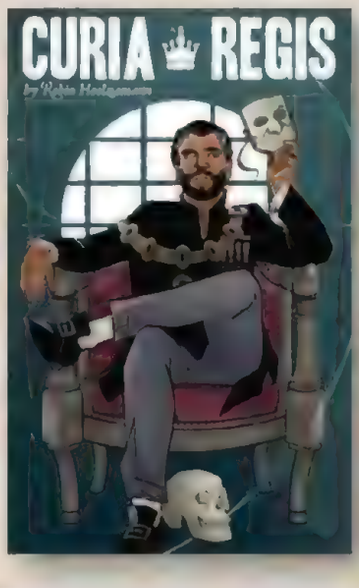
What inspired the series? What attracted you to this style of story?
CR is a kind of experiment. I love stories. All stories, in any format. Many of my favourites are in a subset of the fantasy genre called a 'fantasy of manners'. Books in that subgenre are an eclectic mix of Jane Austen-esque social construct, and adventures dramas such as the *Three Musketeers*.

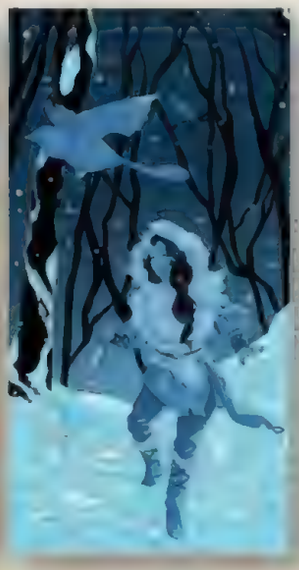
When I started *Curia Regis*, that kind of thing didn't really exist in comics. I wanted to see if I could build a story around emotional beats, focusing in on conversations and interpersonal conflicts while the political landscape escalates in the background. A couple of years after I first started drafting the story, I discovered things like *Strangers In Paradise*, and the comics scene started expanding so quickly. I'm excited to be one of a new generation of storytellers who are making new things accessible to readers looking for something a little different.

Below: At 190 pages and spanning 11 chapters, Volume One of *Curia Regis* is a gripping read. First released in 2016, it quickly establishing a loyal army of fans

How would you classify it? Historical drama?
Fictional history. The world itself is built very loosely on 18th-century France, but I wouldn't even go so far as to call it alternate history. It's entirely made up.

Talk to us a little about your process? What does a week on *Curia Regis* look like?
When I'm knee-deep in a chapter of *Curia Regis*, my weeks all start to look oddly similar. I have a different day job, so I work in batches to get as much output as efficiently as possible. Weekends are spent on tasks that require a lot of mental input: pencilling pages or writing. Weekday evenings, when I need a little more flexibility, are spent inking or flatting the comic. The more brainpower something needs, the more likely I am to do it. When I have a dedicated ten-hour chunk I can invest in teasing out the details.





What advantages does going the webcomic route offer?
Knowing you have readers waiting for the next page of the story is great for keeping motivated. It also teaches new creators to schedule, which is vital if they intend to have a future career that includes work for hire or deadlines of any kind. You learn to figure efficiencies into your workflow, and get a feel for when you need to stop working on a page and move on. It also helps you build up a body of work that shows you can work sequentially.

In some ways it has simplified the answer to "How can I break into comics?" Put your work online. Get it out of your head and out there for people to see it.

What disadvantages, if any?
I think this is going to depend heavily on the person. For me, the webcomics format has some major disadvantages that tie back to how long it took me to complete the first volume of the comic.

I worked on Volume One of *CR* across a period of five years, and it shows. I felt limited in how much I could change the writing or plot in retrospect, because the material was already out there. I can't go back and strip out scenes that I don't think work anymore; I can't condense the plot and make things neater. I can't apply five years of learning backwards. It's more difficult to edit your own work when you're working page by page, and I do think long-form stories suffer for it.

In all honesty there are always going to be things about Volume One that I wish I could go back and remove, because I feel like they weaken the narrative. At the same time, it's an interesting challenge to have that framework there and unchangeable. Webcomics do keep you moving forward.

Does the story have an endpoint?
Absolutely. The ending for *CR* was in my mind the day I started writing the first chapter. At this point, most of the key character scenes for the second half of the story are locked down, and I'm smoothing out the ruffles. The stakes are high for Maren, Jacques and the gang, and if you've read Volume One, we already know a few of their endings aren't flexible.

Has anything changed between planning and getting it on the page?
On a micro level, every page of *Curia Regis* goes through multiple iterations. I write every chapter in prose first. It helps me visualise scenes and character interactions. In the next stage I write it again as a script and things change. Then when I'm laying out the pages, things change again, and again when I'm adding the dialogue. Then it's bound to change again when I'm proofing for print.

Then there are those characters that just take over. Master manipulator Carolina (Lina), for example, was never meant to have such a big role. I wound up redrawing and writing the full first chapter of Volume One partially because she needed to be introduced earlier to explain the focus she was drawing later on. Sometimes it just feels right to shape a story around certain characters – all the planning in the world won't save you from that!

How was your experience with Kickstarter?
Brilliant and terrifying. I've described it to friends as an emotional rollercoaster. I am incredibly grateful to everyone who promoted and pledged for the book, and I'd recommend it to anyone who needs a little help in getting a project funded.

My advice to anyone thinking of taking the plunge is to do as much prep work as you possibly can, be prepared to keep your head in the game for the full 30+ days it requires, and for the love of God, remember to include postage and a financial buffer!

What sort of research is required?
In the initial writing stages, it can take quite a bit of digging around social structure, military history, architecture, art, and on one memorable occasion, whether or not matchbooks were around in the 1740s (spoiler: they weren't). Just because it's fictional history doesn't mean I don't want the comic to have a firm, believable foundation. Rooting it in a time period helps. From there I can tweak, add in a few modern twists, and generally work it into something I'm comfortable with.

What's next on deck for you?
At the moment, I'm gnashing out the details for Volume 2. It's the second half of the story, so there's a lot of loose ends to be tied up in a neat little package, and I'm determined to do it right.

To keep sharp in the meantime, and to stop burning out on one project, I'm working on a dark fairy tale about a wolf witch that a forest people say comes alive at night. I expect the full story to be available at Thought Bubble in Leeds this September, but readers can follow along as I work on it on Patreon.

www.whatido.co.uk

Above: Maren is the highest ranking revolutionary

Below: Jacques II is the leader of the revolution

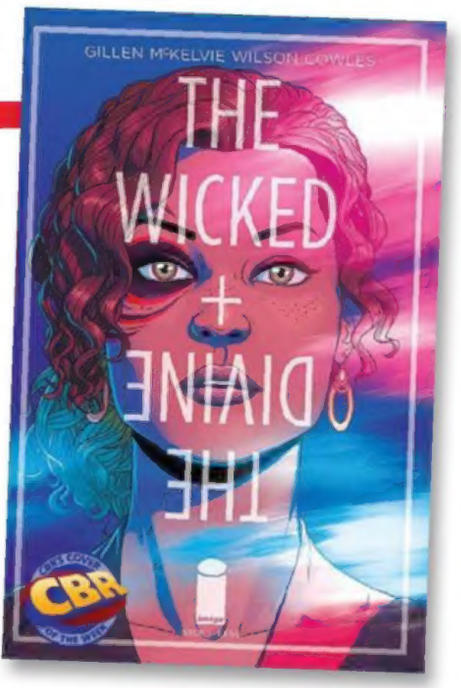
"Get your work out of your head so people can see it"

Robin Hoelzemann

MY LIFE IN COMICS

KIERON GILLEN

CREATOR OF *THE WICKED + THE DIVINE* AND *YOUNG AVENGERS*



FIRST COMIC I EVER READ

I always think of *The Broons* and *Oor Wullie* annuals when visiting relatives in Scotland as a preschooler, which were basically utterly alien artefacts. Basically, it was *Trainspotting* for the under-fives.

FIRST INFLUENCE ON MY WORK

My first (and still primary) influence on my work remains trying to avoid having a real job. I work very hard to avoid having to do any actual work. After that, fear of dying. After that, fear of sub-editors attacking me if I'm late with my copy.

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL COMICS WORK

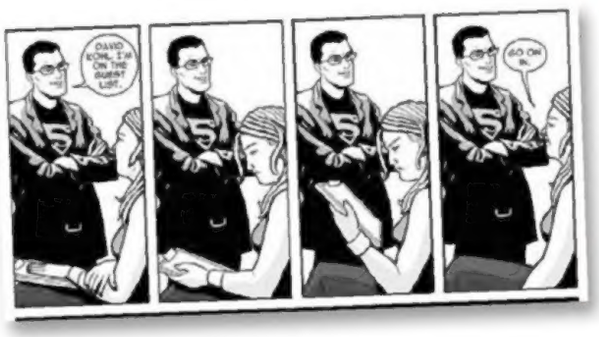
I can only imagine my editors reading the latest mess of a script I've handed in and looking forward to the day I write my first professional comic. My first sale was to *Warhammer Monthly* in 2003, in a heartening story about space-orks being killed by space-dudes on horses via the medium of space-bison stampede.

MY ALL-TIME FAVOURITE COMIC WORK

I'd rather choose something more obscure so I can keep up my reputation as a posturing elitist, but if you remove *Watchmen* from my life, and you simply don't have my life. It's a piece of formalist grandeur, and I rip it off on a daily basis.

MY BEST PROJECT I'VE WORKED ON

If I had to save a single volume of my work from a bonfire, I'd choose my collaboration with Jamie McKelvie and Matthew Wilson, *Phonogram: The Singles Club*. If I could save a whole series, *The Wicked + The Divine*. I'd then wonder why people were burning all my books, and feel sad.



THE CHARACTER I'D MOST LIKE TO WRITE FOR

Given the choice, someone I've made up. I'm not the sort of creative who spends time daydreaming about working on a property that I don't own. I save my daydreams for myself and rent out my daydreams if someone is paying me to do so. Alternative answer: Bojack Horseman.

THE COMICS I AM CURRENTLY READING

We're in a golden age now, so trying to cram even a taste here seems impossible. There's too much stuff, and it's wonderful. Er... *Underwinter* dropped this week and is amazing. *The Black Monday Murders* is a triumph. I just re-read the new edition of *Scooter Girl* which is an utter joy. So! Much! Stuff!

THE PROJECTS I AM CURRENTLY WORKING ON

The Wicked + The Divine, *Uber: Invasion*, *Doctor Aphra*, *Modded* (in *Cinema Purgatorio*) and exciting things that have yet to be announced.

Top: *Young Avengers* was relaunched by Gillen and artist Jamie McKelvie in 2013. **Above:** *The Wicked + The Divine is a fantasy series* that centres around a group of characters with supernatural powers, and has an overarching focus on themes of life and death.

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